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FRANCESCA CARRARA.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

ROMANCE AND REALITY, THE VENÉTIAN BRACELET,

§c. §c.

— “ Must we in tears
Unwind a love knit up by many years ?
I cannot break my faith — cannot re-send
The truest heart that lover e'er did lend.”

KING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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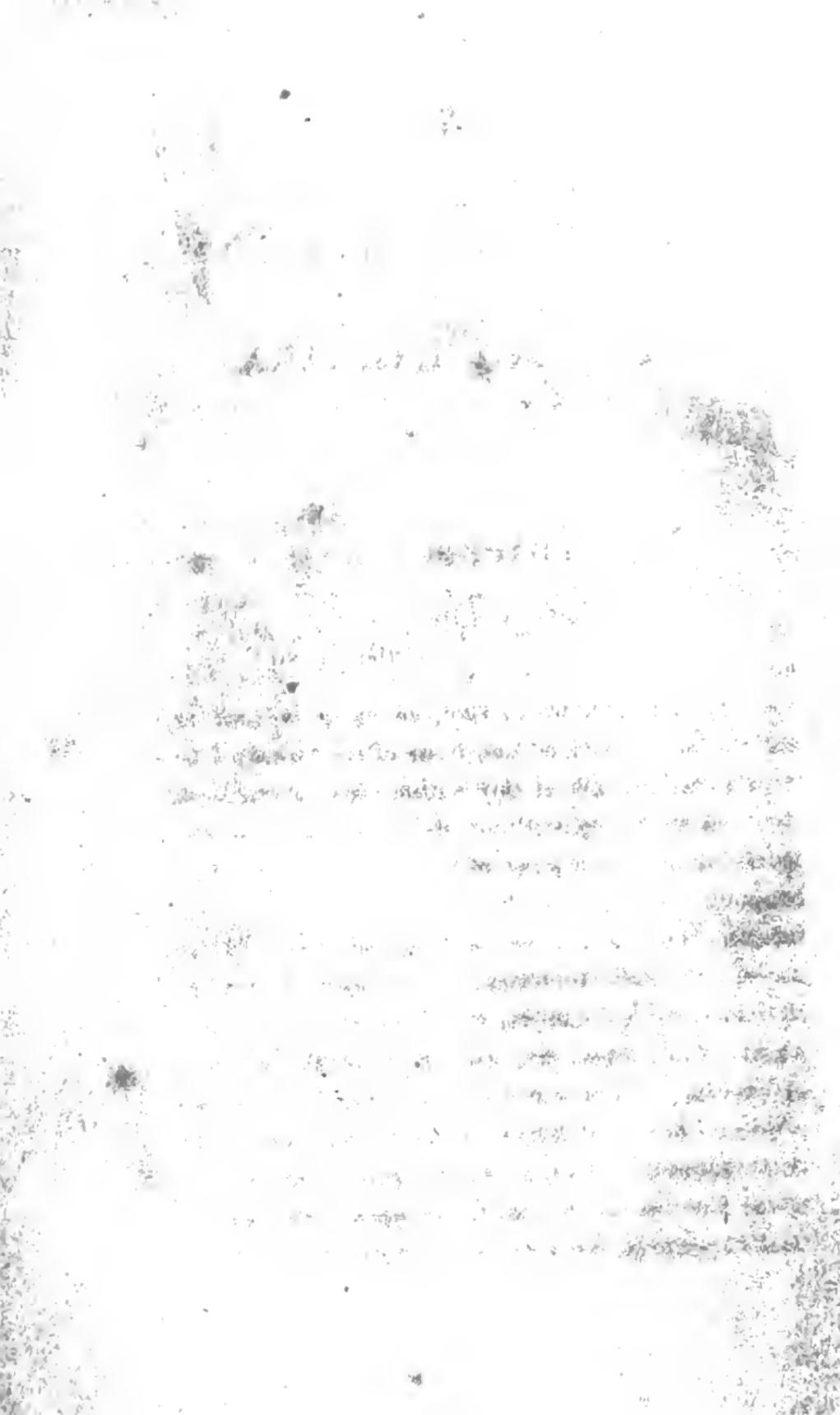
MRS. WYNDHAM LEWIS.

DEAR MADAM,

May I inscribe to you the present Work?—
a slight remembrance of your kindness to

Your affectionate

L. E. L.



FRANCESCA CARRARA.

CHAPTER I.

“The remembrance of youth is a sigh.”

Arabian Proverb.

TOIL is the portion of day, as sleep is that of night; but if there be one hour of the twenty-four which has the life of day without its labour, and the rest of night without its slumber, it is the lovely and languid hour of twilight. The shadows have not yet deepened into darkness, as yet the boughs droop not, and the fragrant leaves of the flower are still unclosed. The magnificence of the noon which excites, the mystery of the midnight which awes, are distinct from the softness of evening. It is earth’s brief breathing space, after the heat and hurry of her busier time; like that repose known only to the young and happy, when the nerves gradually compose themselves, the thoughts gather into some vague but delicious

train, and the eyes are closed by languor before sleep.

The day had been oppressively hot, but now a heavy dew fell, and a cool wind stirred the trees. The flowers raised their heads, and repaid the moisture by exhaling their hoarded sweetness ; the thrush sang a few notes, low and soft, like the unconscious expression of enjoyment ; and the cypresses, whose spiral heads had declined in the heat, now stood upright, stately and refreshed. The last hue of crimson had died away in the west, and the depth of the rich purple atmosphere was unbroken.

“ It is too dark,” said the young sculptor, as he let his hand fall listlessly by his side, and stood gazing on the bust, as only the lover who looks on the face beloved, and the artist who looks on his own work, can gaze. The tenderness of the one, and the pride of the other, were blended in the youth’s countenance. Again he resumed his seat, but not his employment ; the lulling influence of the time was upon him. Sunshine, like truth, would have been too strong for such dreams as those in which he was indulging ; but they harmonised with the dim shades now flitting round. Suddenly one of those rose-edged clouds in which a chance sunbeam lingers to the

last, flung, as it floated by, the full richness of its colouring on the marble. The artist was recalled, by his sense of beauty, to reality.

“ O, my sister, do come and see how exquisite is this effect !” exclaimed he, with all that youthful eagerness which is impatient for sympathy in its delight.

Slowly the maiden came from the adjacent window, where she had been leaning silent and apart. But her reverie had been deeper far than his. He had dwelt on fancies—she on thought ; and the charm of the one was sooner removed than the weight of the other.

“ Very beautiful, Guido !” said she, kindly ;—but kindness was not enough for one who wanted admiration.

Strange mystery of our nature, that those in whom genius develops itself in imagination, thus taking its most ethereal form, should yet be the most dependent on the opinions of others ! Praise is their very existence ; and those who have the wings of the dove, with which they might “ flee away and be at rest,” delight rather to linger on the high road, forgetting that where the sunshine falls, there too gathers the dust, and that the soil remains when the silver lustre has passed. Alas ! thus ever does the weakness of our nature

rebuke its strength, and genius is brought to the level—ay, below the level—of common humanity, by an unquenchable thirst for its applause.

“If she had been really my sister,” thought Guido, “she would have entered into my feelings;” and he turned almost resentfully away. One glance at the pale cheek and glistening eyelashes of his cousin (for such she really was, though the names of brother and sister came familiar to their familiar intercourse) brought him again to her side.

“Why do you weep, dearest Francesca?” he whispered, in those low and musical tones which only affection can utter.

For reply she leant her head on his shoulder; and as he threw his arm round her waist, he could feel that strong, though suppressed, emotion shook the slight frame which he supported. He led her tenderly to the window, and they sat down together. Suddenly a few notes of distant music arose on the air. Both started as if each had some peculiar interest in the sound. The flush died as rapidly as it came on the cheek of Francesca:

“It is not yet time for vespers—it is only the song of some boatmen.”

Guido gazed upon her earnestly. “Francesca,

sister, dearest, you weep! Can it be that you will leave us?"

The girl raised her large eyes, yet shining with tears. Their affectionate reproach was answer enough.

"Alas!" continued he, "we are not happy as we were once wont to be; how indifferent are we grown to so much that we used to love! how altered we are, and in such brief space! No affection have we now for the snow-white doves, or the agile squirrel, in which we once took such delight; we feed them, but it is as a duty, not as a pleasure. No longer do we nurse the last glimmer in the lamp, to pore over the enchanted page of Tasso. No more do we rise with the first red on the sky, and, hurrying to the green wood, call ourselves knights and enthralled princesses, and our mimic sports adventures. I keenly feel how the actual is superseding our imaginative world. Already the weight of the future is upon us; we plan and calculate, rather than hope. We find how little we have to do with our destiny, and yet, forsooth, we seek to direct it. Ever since that English stranger arrived ——"

A shrill, harsh voice from the farther extremity of the chamber interrupted their discourse. "English! English! — who names under my roof

the only word which is there forbidden? Talk, children, of what you list, but never let my old ears be startled by the mention of those accursed islanders!"

The speaker was an aged man — aged he seemed beyond the common lot of humanity — and thin, shrivelled, and contracted, as if the popular belief were true, that his life was prolonged by chemical secrets, and that he won from subtle drugs and essences a meagre and protracted existence. The anger of Carrara (for such was the old man's name) was of brief duration, and almost the following moment he became immersed in his former occupation.

It was a strange scene, the contrasts which met in that large but dilapidated chamber. It had been the banqueting-hall in the ancient palace of the La Franchi, but the revelry and the splendour had long since passed away. The history of its former possessors had been the history of most noble families. First pomp, finally want — the gorgeous retinue reduced to the scanty train — daughter after daughter to convent — son after son to the wars; one remnant of olden state vanishing after another, till the last of the line died a forgotten exile, in some obscure skirmish far away from his native land. One or two aged

dependants still lingered amid the lonely walls ; they died too ; and for years the deserted palace had been left to the bird, the insect, and the weed. The bat and the owl made it their home, the spider wove its dreary tapestry, the grass made its way through the tessellated floors, the moss grew over the untrodden pavement, and the ivy — the fragile and creeping ivy — was now the chief support of the battlements which it had overrun.

Fifteen years previous to the commencement of this narrative, a stranger far advanced in years had suddenly arrived in the neighbourhood, and had taken up his abode in the left wing, which part of the building was by some chance in a better state of preservation than the rest. There were none to dispute his place of refuge, whose principal attraction seemed to be a high tower yet remaining, where he could take his astronomical observations. It was soon ascertained that he subsisted on a moderate sum of money, lodged in the hands of a Lombard merchant, and that his habits were eccentric and unsocial to a degree that almost denoted an unsettled mind.

Francisco da Carrara was in reality one of those visionaries whose imagination gave its own fascination to science ; he gazed on the stars with

the eye of the sage but the heart of the poet, till he deemed that to him was given the key of their mysteries, and that he read on their bright scroll the secrets of the future. His life had for years been devoted to one mystic search—the discovery of the philosopher's stone—and, like most of the enthusiasts in that wild pursuit, he firmly believed that every hour brought him nearer to an immortality upon earth, which in reality drew him closer and closer to the grave. Enduring poverty—at least privation—unremitting in his toil at the furnace, or his watch upon the night—worn, withered, and become what would now be but an object of pity and derision—that pale alchemist was happier than many of those whose triumphs over science in our day win the gold medal, and the alphabet for an array to their name. He sufficed unto himself; no mortification, that inevitable result of competition, embittered even success.

I do believe there is no existence so content as that whose present is engrossed by employment, and whose future is filled by some strong hope, the truth of which is never proved. Toil and illusion are the only secrets to make life tolerable, and both of these were his.

He had, too, his own small sphere of usefulness; for his advice and medicines were eagerly

sought by his neighbours, and their vague dread of his mysterious pursuits and supposed spiritual intercourse was merged in thankfulness for kindness and assistance. Two lovely companions had he in his solitude, his grandchildren. When he first arrived, the boy was five, and the girl nearly two, years of age. They were cousins; Guido being the child of Carrara's son, and Francesca of his daughter. More than this no one knew. The nurse who arrived with him died before she had become sufficiently confidential with any of the peasantry round to do more than hint at terrible domestic misfortunes, which had driven them from their dwelling in Padua.

The old man himself never alluded to his former life. When he went back upon the past, it was to recall honours long departed, and the deeds of an heroic house, whose splendour he often vaguely hinted he was destined to revive. There was an antique parchment, illuminated with various devices illustrative of the records of the Carrara family—there was the banner with its red fish from which they took their name—there was the celebrated Francisco, in full armour, mounted on a steed whose head was covered with white plumes—there was the likeness of the heroic Madonna Tadie—and last, not least in

interest, the gloomy dungeons of Venice, where perished the brave and youthful chieftains of Padua. From this parchment, the history of the house of Carrara, he delighted to hear his young descendants read. Thus from childhood was their imagination filled with the honours of the past and the hopes of the future — hopes the more magnificent, from the vague hints which at times escaped from their usually taciturn parent.

The side of the Tiber on which they lived was thinly inhabited; a family of decayed nobility, named Mancini, and a convent of poor nuns, where the little Francesca acquired some knowledge of embroidery and of music, were their only neighbours. Guido had been entirely educated by his grandfather, who applied to the task by fits and starts; and in like manner the boy had taken frequent fancies of instructing his cousin, or, as she was always called, his sister. Guido was twenty, and Francesca seventeen. The three were now assembled in the old banqueting-hall, which, from its state of better preservation, had become their ordinary chamber.

The old man was seated in a large low arm-chair, whose rich carvings of black oak were almost architectural in their dimensions; it was drawn close to the huge and gloomy chimney,

where was placed a small pan of charcoal, whose red glare served to shew rather than disperse the gloom around. Over this was simmering a preparation of herbs, which diffused a strong but pleasant odour. A single line of light wandered amid the obscurity—it came from an open door, beyond which a winding staircase led to the tower where Carrara spent much of his time.

Farther on, the room became lighter ; it was just the contrast between youth and age. The two oriel windows were especially appropriated by the cousins. At the one the day was admitted freely, and fell on the various products of the sculptor's skill ; all touched with something of melancholy, which in youth seems to prophesy the fate it afterwards, perhaps, serves to fulfil. There were casts of the Gladiator—he whose native courage struggled against the doom which was yet welcome—a mournful allegory of honour. The Niobe stricken by that inexorable destiny which the ancients so well knew was never yet shunned nor propitiated by human effort. The Antinoüs, where death is in a face of youthful beauty—the shadow of the tomb resting upon hope and love. Below were two or three graceful urns, but wreathed with cypress ; and a vase, but a serpent was coiled

around it. In the midst was a nearly finished bust, and the sculptor might well direct the eye to mark the spiritual expression it wore in the purple shadows of evening ; so pale, so pure, yet so tender. Another moment, and that transparent cheek would surely redden into blushes. The hair fell in curls over the face, and was gathered up behind in a knot, from which hung some rich ringlets. These, however, did not conceal the haughty turn of the head, erect like that of a young Semiramis. The features were somewhat less regular than is usual with an Italian face, but their expression in the marble was full of sweetness.

Over the other window an odorous creeping-plant had been carefully trained, and the slender leaves and clusters of pale blue flowers were like a fretted arabesque on the clear and amber-hued air. A few books were ranged on one side ; a lute leant against the other, near which was a frame half hidden by a piece of unfinished embroidery. In the centre was a small table, and on it was placed a vase filled with roses.

The two cousins were resting on the window-seat. The family likeness between them was slight, though it might be traced in the Greek

nose and short upper lip. The youth had the clear olive skin of the south, but warmed with that flushed and variable crimson which is the outward sign of the feverish and sensitive temperament—while the large dark eyes were strangely mournful for one whose years and sorrows had been so few. The girl was without a tinge of colour, but very fair; the soft white of the Parian marble strongly contrasted with hair of the most ebon black—at first, the long and shadowy lashes made the downcast eye seem also dark, but when raised it was of that intense and violet blue, so rarely seen but in children, or in April skies. There was more energy, and therefore more hope, in her face than in that of Guido. The mind depends more on the body than we like to admit—and Francesca's childhood had been unbroken by the weakness and pain which had so often stretched Guido on a bed of sickness, beside which only affection could have hoped—affection, that believes not in death, until it be present in the house.

It is as truly as it is beautifully said, that “perfect love casteth out fear” even in our frail nature; and the love between those two orphans was as perfect as human love could be. At no sacrifice for the one could the other have hesi-

tated, and no sacrifice would it have seemed—the most entire devotion would have appeared a simple act of their ordinary affection. Guido knew that the image of another was graven on the inmost heart of each. With that knowledge came no coldness—no distrust—but firmer reliance and deeper confidence.

Again music rose on the air ; this time they really heard the convent chimes. Francesca rose from her seat, and took her veil.

“ Shall I go with you, dearest ? ”

“ Not now ; I will tell you all, to-morrow,” was the almost inaudible reply. Both turned from the door, though each took a different path.

At first, Guido’s step was slow, and he walked as one absorbed in mournful thought ; but at a turn in his path, which commanded the country below, his face brightened, and he sprung on his way, as if every moment of his time were precious. He soon arrived at the villa of the Mancini, where his evenings were usually spent ; how much more cheerful was it than his own home !

The Marchese was, as usual, closeted in his own chamber, where, since his wife’s death at least, he enjoyed that indolent quiet in which he delighted. His daughters were assembled in a large hall, opening on the garden ; the two -

younger were seated by a cage of rare foreign birds from the golden isles of Canary, half-caressing, half-teasing them — the two elder were standing beneath the verandah, seemingly in earnest discourse. It was easy to recognise in the tallest, the original of the bust ; but either the look she bent on the young sculptor was not such as she often wore, or else he had given its softness from his own heart, for scorn was native to those features, and disdain familiar to her keen and falcon-like eyes.

“ Ah, no !” said her sister, a fair, timid-looking girl, who though in reality the elder by two years, yet appeared the junior ; “ I should like a home like a nest, in some quiet valley. Do you remember the fairy tale of the two lovers, who, surrounded by enemies, were saved from the terrible giant who pursued the princess, by being turned into doves ? How happily must they have dwelt in the greenwood together !”

“ Yes ; hunting for worms or barleycorns, hatching their eggs, and trembling at every schoolboy that came near. Give me the vest glittering with jewels ; the high place at the tournament, the gaze of every knight turned upon me, till even he who fought against the one wearing my colours, felt, as he laid lance in rest, that the strife was

vain ; how could he combat in honour of that beauty which his own eyes saw was far surpassed?"

" And he who wore your colours?"

" That five hundred should be proud to do ; the best and proudest of the land. Pity it were for starry eyes not to emulate the stars, and shine on many. I own one lover is difficult to manage ; for to one lover you may have yielded more of your heart than I care to surrender of mine. But the many—why, I should hold them as we do yonder branch of roses—we like their general effect, and care not if one drop off, so that another supply its place. Fancy now a lighted hall, and a group of white-plumed cavaliers ; I would have a smile for one, a sigh for a second, a frown for a third."

" And in the meantime, till these honours arrive, you have me to rehearse with, and Guido Carrara to practise upon."

" Nonsense!"

" Yes, to you, who have no stronger motive than amusement—no deeper feeling than vanity ; but, Marie, you are cruel to trifle with a love so earnest, so devoted——"

" That you would like to be its object. Pray take him—you are very welcome ; ah, yonder he comes ! now I will be disinterested, confide to

him the passion he has inspired, protest against being your rival, and generously resign him."

"The sacrifice would be too great, for there is no one here to supply his place," interrupted her sister, somewhat more angrily than the occasion required: but at this moment Guido ascended the steps which led to the little terrace where they now stood.

"We have been expecting you some time," said Henrietta, kindly.

"I saw you in eager discourse, as I approached."

"We were," replied Marie, "employed in aërial architecture—the future for our ground-work; I was fancying a lover for myself."

"A lover!" answered Guido, in a low and altered voice.

"Ay, such a lover as these degenerate times are little likely to produce; one who, as the princely Medici, or the gallant Doria, were the glory of their cities, would be the glory of his. One to whom superiority was a birth-right, and success a comrade; brave, generous, aspiring; one to whom nothing could seem impossible.

"And what," exclaimed the youth, gazing upon her, "could be impossible with such inspiration? Love lends its own strength to the effort

it excites. I have ever deemed it was for love's sweet sake that Columbus sought and found the bright world so long parted from her paler sister, that even tradition had forgotten the cause. What but some delicious dream, whose hues rose only dazzling upon solitude, made him linger on the twilight coast? When he marked the waves swallow up the leaf and bough that floated upon them—what looked he on the waters to see, but one beloved face mirrored by his fancy? Deem you not, in after-years, his glorious triumph brought a dearer joy than pride—was not that sunny hemisphere a worthy offering to the proudest beauty in Castile?"

Henrietta had left her sister's side, whose eyes sank beneath those of Guido—and she now wore the look of the exquisite marble he had fashioned into softness. There are some moments, the hues of which are like those on the wing of a butterfly—a touch brushes them away. There are words to paint the misery of love, but none to paint its happiness; that childish, glad, and confiding time to which youth gave its buoyancy, and hope its colours. Its language repeated, ever seems exaggerated or foolish; albeit there are none who have not thought such sounds "honey-sweet" in their time. The truth is, we never make for others

the allowance we make for ourselves; and we should deny even our own words, could we hear them spoken by another. We will therefore leave the young Italian to paint the future as the imagination ever paints. Troth but it was fitting speech for the moonlight: moonlight, the bright and clear, but the cold—which, unlike the sun, opens no flowers, and ripens no fruit.

CHAPTER II.

“Farewell!
For in that word—that fatal word—howe'er
We promise, hope, believe—there breathes despair.”

BYRON.

THE history of a minute—why it would give a bird's-eye view of every possible variety in human existence. Wonderful the many events that are happening together—life and death; joy and sorrow; the great and the mean; the common and the rare; good and evil; are all in the record of that brief segment of time.

We left the moonlight shining on the bright eye and the crimsoning blush—we proceed to where it fell on the glittering lash and the pale and tearful cheek. There was something cheerful in the scene which we have just left—the window opening into the garden-room filled with many gladdening signs of daily amusement and occupation, and the silence broken by the light laugh and mirthful tones of the children who were watching the birds. But here all was mournful and desolate—for nothing is more mournful than

man's work and man's skill going to ruin for want of man's care—and nothing is more desolate than the moss and the green weed choking the fountain, and half hiding the fallen column.

The silver waters of the spring had long since disappeared, but there still were left a few of the Corinthian pillars, some stretched on the ground and overgrown with creeping-plants, while two or three yet remained erect, and shewed how graceful the whole must have been. There was a fragment, too, of broken wall, on which were seated Francesca and a young cavalier, one whose long fair hair and clear blue eye spoke of a more northern clime than her own.

“ Let my father once see you,” urged the youth, “ and I am sure of his consent; we will then return hither, where you will be the dearer for your brief absence; your grandfather will renounce his strange antipathy to my country in witnessing your happiness—and—for the stars shine as brightly on Evelyn Abbey as they do on yonder old tower—who knows but the philosopher's stone may be discovered in England?”

Francesca let him speak on; she was happy at least while she listened; but silence was no answer, for here, at least, it gave no consent.

" You forget the other side," said she ; " what if Sir Robert Evelyn refuse to receive for his daughter the unknown and portionless Italian ; how shall I brook to be the first cause of difference between a father and son, to whom the averted look and the harsh word have been hitherto unknown ?"

The young Englishman gazed for a moment tenderly on her beautiful face.

" The averted look, the harsh word, such are not for you, Francesca !"

" Methinks," returned the Italian, " they would be but my fitting reward. How could your father expect a daughter's love from one who had left her own in his old age ; left him, too, without his blessing ; nay, without his knowledge ; his solitude embittered by anxiety for one who had no pity on his age, no memory for his care. I have heard, Evelyn, and have often read, in the tales of my own land, how, for her strange and sudden passion, a maiden has left home and parents, forgetting how her infancy was watched, and her youth cherished. So could not I. Few and feeble are the steps which my father must measure towards the grave ; but during those few, I must be at his side, Evelyn. How holy the

claim, when age asks from youth but a little time, and a little tendance to smooth the passage to the tomb!"

Both were silent—a pause which was broken by the convent-clock striking nine.

"It is late!" exclaimed Francesca, forcing a smile. "I must not stay here talking of duty—and all my household ones awaiting me; you do not know what an important person I am at home!" but the effort was too much, and dropping her head on Evelyn's arm, she gave way to a burst of weeping.

"Look up, love," at length said her companion; "I would fain link the memory of our parting with something less earthly than word or gift. Do you see yonder large clear star near the moon,—it shines here as I have seen it shine a thousand times in my own island—let it be a token between us. When, dim and cloudy, its place is not seen in the sky—we will be sorrowful, and think even so are we far away and hidden from each other; but when it looks forth rejoicing and glorious, it shall be unto us as a sign and as a hope, and we will believe in a bright future and a fair destiny."

"I shall watch it to-morrow night," whispered Francesca.

A few more hurried words—blessings scarce noted at the time, but dearly remembered afterwards, and they parted. The ilex boughs closed behind the light form of the maiden, while the young Englishman sprang rapidly down the narrow path leading to the inn whence he was to start on the morrow by daybreak.

It matters little to trace the rapidity of the land journey, or the monotony of the sea voyage—alike unmarked by adventure. Robert Evelyn landed at Southampton, and immediately procured horses for himself and two servants; for his father's house lay some twenty miles inland.

“I would have you look to your pistols, young gentleman,” said the landlord. Robert stared at such advice in England; but the many suspicious-looking individuals and groups that he passed, made him rejoice at having followed it. It was obvious that their bold and prepared bearing kept more than one party at bay.

Well known as every inch of the country was to Evelyn, he paused more than once to gaze upon its unfamiliar appearance. Fields which he remembered yellow with the waving corn, lay fallow, though the month was June; and one or two that bore signs of a luxuriant crop, were trampled down, and the wheat was rotting on the ground.

The hedges were full of gaps, made in the most reckless manner ; and the meadows, which had evidently not been mown, were either quite bare, or covered with irregular patches of rank, coarse grass, whose vegetation was exhausting itself. Many of the cottages were deserted, and the thatch blackening with neglect and damp ; the lattices gone from their frames, the pear-trees loosened from the walls, and their branches, grey with moss, and heavy with leaves, not fruit, trailing upon the grass-grown walks, told that the desolation was no work of yesterday. A few dwellings of the very lowest order were yet inhabited, but at the riders' approach the doors were hastily closed, and not a creature could be seen, even at the windows. “And yet this is market-day!” and the traveller remembered what a cheerful scene the road used to present—from the substantial yeoman on his good brown cob, to the peasant girls, with baskets and red cloaks, whose voices and laughter were heard long before themselves were seen. Now the chief occupiers of the path were a few meagre cows, picking up a scanty subsistence.

A sudden turn in the road brought them opposite a spot where Robert had passed many a happy day. Involuntarily he drew his horse to a stand, and remained gazing with speechless dismay on

the scene before him. The house had been burned to the ground : the mouldering walls of the lower floor, and huge heaps of ashes, from which the weeds were beginning to spring up, were all that remained of the former hospitable dwelling. The garden, which sloped down to the highway, was utterly destroyed, and the skeletons of two large trees stood charred and blackened from the effects of fire. Robert was roused from his trance by a hand rudely laid on his bridle-rein, while a hoarse voice exclaimed,

“ So, my young cavalier,—regaling yourself with a sight of the ruin you and yours have wrought. Speak,—your name, and business here ?”

Evelyn had been so lost in contemplation of the melancholy scene before him, that he had not observed the approach of a detachment of cavalry, by whom he and his attendants were now surrounded. He looked upon the officer, whose hand was yet upon his rein ; but the idea which presented itself was too improbable. “ The son of Sir Robert Evelyn,” said he, after a moment, “ cannot be an intruder in these parts !”

“ Sir Robert Evelyn is a good man and true : his son is welcome—let him pass !”

The voice—harsh, changed as it was—con-

firmed Robert's first suspicion; though he might well hesitate to recognise the cheerful, cordial friend of yore, in the cold, pale, and stern-looking horseman before him. "Surely you will not let me pass," said the youth, "without some token of remembrance, Mr. Johnstone?"

"Call me not," exclaimed the officer fiercely, "by the appellations of the ungodly! My name is now, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord: I will repay!' and am not I His instrument on earth? Ride on, ride on, young man—spare neither whip nor spur; for the aged is even now in the valley of the shadow of death. Robert Evelyn," added he, in a softened and kinder tone, "must be sorely changed, if he speed not, that his father may bless him ere he die."

Evelyn waited no answer, but rode on; and the clang of heavy horse-tramp was faint in the distance before his companion recovered from his surprise. "My father ill!" thought he,—"he hinted not at this in his letter:—ah, he knew the wish he expressed for my return was enough, and he was fain to spare my anxiety. Ill—dying, and I not there!"

His horse was urged to its utmost speed, and in one hour arrived, covered with foam, at the abbey gate. It was barred, and he could hear

within the measured step of the sentinel ; his challenge was, however, instantly answered, and the courtyard was filled with domestics, all eager with words of welcome.

“ My father ? ” exclaimed he.

“ Better—much better,” was the steward’s reply.

Robert’s eyes swam with tears ; and he could only wave with his hand an answer to the many greetings around. He ran forwards to the library, and in another moment was in his father’s arms.

CHAPTER III.

“ So we began to set every thing to rights.”

Ordinary Plans.

“ CHANGES, many, indeed, and sad changes,” said Sir Robert Evelyn, “ have chanced since you left us. I have seen our peaceful England, on whose shore warfare had become but a dark tradition, or a gallant hope to the young and adventurous spirits who sought for honour abroad—I have seen it become the field of deadly battle, where the father raised his hand against the son, and the son against the father. I have seen the beacon blazing instead of the Christmas hearth ; and the ivy, which for more than a century had wreathed undisturbed round these old battlements, has been pretty well cut away by the musketry during the last siege.”

“ Siege, my father! and I not at your side!” exclaimed Robert reproachfully.

“ In truth, dear child, I wished not for you.

My lot has been cast in troubled times, and glad should I have been to have saved you from the responsibility of that decision which I have found a heavy burden. In private conduct you are called upon to act according to your conscience, and your guide is infallible. In public you act according to your ability, and, God knows! that is often insufficient to decide amid conflicting events. How differently, at different times, do we view the same things! Now, who can admit this, yet not distrust his judgment? I had hoped that, our troubles being ended, you might on your return to England have seen no cause for hesitation; but such is the unsettled state of affairs, that, alas! expediency seems now your mean but only guide."

" Methinks, my father, I need do little but follow in your steps, and ask for your advice."

" Alas, Robert! it is for the aged, they say, to give advice; the aged, who, perforce, must know its inefficiency—for advice to be useful it must suit the circumstances; and when do circumstances fall out according to expectation? When I stood by the side of Hampden, contending against a heavy oppression, and for an undeniable right, who could have thought that his refusal to

pay that twenty shillings ship-money would be the first act of a resistance that was destined to arouse a whole nation, and kindle civil war from one end of our island to the other?"

" Yet, surely," interrupted his listener, " you do not repent of one of the noblest acts to which patriotism ever stimulated an individual?"

" Never! during the many troubles that followed the scenes of bloodshed that ensued, I have looked back to the pure and honourable motives, and to the enlightened views, with which our resistance commenced, in a spirit of great consolation and the perfect conviction of its necessity. I have never doubted for a moment but that we acted for the best. The benefit has not, as yet, been equal to the evil; we have not yet succeeded to our hope—liberty is still insecure, and England is still rent by small factions, distracted by foolish bigotries, and now at the will of one man; yet the good seed has been sown. We have shewn what opposition may effect, and what individual exertions may achieve. We have awakened men to the knowledge of their rights; and though for a while the energy of this nation may sleep after its fierce struggle, a lesson has been given which may never be forgotten. The

great names of our day will long be the watchwords of England's freedom. We have left behind us a legacy of right, which will accumulate. Still, I look around with disappointment. Judiciously avoiding the name of king, Cromwell rules us with a power far exceeding that of the monarch we dethroned."

" But why," asked the younger Evelyn, " yield to Cromwell, when you resisted Charles?"

" From exhaustion, and the force of individual character. Cromwell is the master-spirit of his age ; he has the bodily courage which inspires in the field, and the moral courage which sways in the council. Deeply imbued with the prevailing fanaticism, what would be to another ~~an~~ obstacle is to him a motive. He is not deterred by its absurdity, for he perceives it not ; he is not disgusted by its pretensions, for they are his own. Like all great leaders in political convulsions, he has reached its high places by flinging himself, with all the force of powerful talents, into the errors, the passions, and the prejudices of his time. But, however his power may have been won, all must allow that it is most worthily worn. During the brief period of his vigorous administration, how altered is the position of England ! Security

at home, and respect abroad, these are the first-fruits of Cromwell's sway. The miserable state of the country around, the consequence of the late rising, sufficiently shews its folly."

"Was Mr. Johnstone's house then destroyed?"

"No, long before; that was the cause of my taking up arms. It is foolishness to say, that no private feelings shall actuate us in a public cause. I had resolved on a neutral position; I deemed that what influence I might possess would be best exerted in mediation: but this outrage put aside all my cooler plans. Johnstone's relatives were more puritanically given than himself; and one of them, a preacher, was residing with him, when a detachment of Goring's dragoons demanded, or rather took shelter there for the night. Their profane jesting and loud oaths called forth a rebuke from the saint, which was received with the utmost contumely. Johnstone deemed he was called upon to resent the insults offered to his guest; one word led to others; swords were drawn, and a fierce contest ensued. Ere morning, his house was burnt to the ground; his two children perished in the flames, and his own life was only preserved by the fidelity of a servant, who bore him insensible to a hovel near. The next day he was brought hither, and that very evening

I too was favoured with a visit from the same regiment. But they found the closed gate and the loaded gun ; and their attack was beaten off with considerable loss. Since then my military career has been tolerably active."

" And I not at your side!" said Robert, bitterly.

" Nay, my child," replied his father, in a sad and earnest tone ; " never lament that you have had no part in civil war ; it is terrible to be asked for quarter in your native tongue, and yet spare not. To know that the corn-field over which you hurry in pursuit of a flying enemy has been sown by your near neighbour—to see the sky redden at midnight, and fear lest the crimson blaze arise from your own home—to watch the desolation of familiar things—to become acquainted with waste and want, and worse, with the crime and recklessness, their inevitable consequences—and then remember how brief a period has elapsed since such things seemed impossible in the land."

" But must the blessing ever be bought by the curse ? Is civil war, then, the fearful sacrifice demanded by liberty ?"

" Not so," replied Sir Robert ; " England's next struggle will be bloodless. We have left one great experience, that the struggle which is to

be decided by the sword will bring repentance for the strife. Surely men will learn from the events of our time, how much to dread excitement, and to eschew passion. Opinion should guide in public affairs, not feeling. Opinion is grounded on circumstance, on observation, and on reflection. Feeling acts from impulse, which sees but half. Excitement leads to enthusiasm, that moral intoxication, whose effects seem incredible to the sober, while the influence which produces the extravagance appears more extraordinary than the act itself. The demon of fanaticism was the shape which it took with us ; and verily, what with religious republicans, harmonists, quakers, fifth-monarchy men, presbyterians, and the reign of the saints upon earth, it needs the strong hand of a Cromwell to reduce the spiritual chaos to any sort of order."

The conversation, which had been continued in the soft dimness of a summer evening, was now interrupted by the appearance of supper. Evelyn was struck with the alteration in his father's habits ; it had been so constant a rule for the household to sup together. " It keeps up that feeling of attachment which is the best bond of society, a humane and frequent intercourse," was wont to be a frequent exclamation ; " may

the rich and the poor never dwell so far apart as to be in equal ignorance of each other's real condition!" But as the light fell on Sir Robert's emaciated figure, and wan though still fine face, no longer animated by the joy of his son's return, the ravage of disease became visible; and it was no marvel that bodily weakness shunned exertion.

"To-morrow," said the invalid, "you shall take my place at the board; to-night I cannot spare you."

Perhaps there is no moment when beloved objects are so much beloved, as on the return from a long absence. When the thousand fears for their health, their safety, and their welfare, have all been proved to be vain; while the reaction from their depression is so exhilarating. When the many merits which fancy has added to their own, are all warm from the thought; all fresh, too, with the gloss of novelty, untarnished with recent differences, and unworn by daily use. How pleasant the hurry of their arrival, and the many preparations to receive them! In winter, the warmest seat by the fire; in summer, the coolest by the open lattice. Then the supper, where all former likings are so carefully remembered; the cheerful flutter of spirits, the disposition to talk,

the still greater desire to listen, the flushed cheek, the eager yet glistening eye ; and—for the future will ever intrude upon the mortal present—the delight of thinking, “ we shall still be together to-morrow.” Assuredly meeting after absence is one of—ah, no!—it is life’s most delicious feeling.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Look on this picture, and on this—
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.”

HAMLET.

IT is wonderful how some words ever were invented, for they express what does not exist—*confidence* is among the number; confidence is what no human being ever really had in another. Robert Evelyn felt his heart swell, and the tears swim in his eyes, at the touching tenderness with which his father received him; and yet he could not force himself to rely on that tenderness as a guarantee for consent to a marriage—now the horizon which bounded his future of happiness. He shrank from mentioning his pledge to Francesca. It is a painful thing both to parent and child, when the one must own, and the other must hear, the avowal of a love which is dearer than all old ties, and all former affection. There was as much delicacy as distrust in his hesitation. He wandered thoughtfully in

the *plaisance* adjoining the house, planning, as we all plan, circumstances which never arrive; and framing speeches which, when the time comes, we never make. His musings were interrupted by a summons from Sir Robert, whom he found seated in a small oratory that had been his mother's favourite room. It was panelled in black oak, but on each panel the arms of the family were painted in bright colours. The mantel-piece was of great rarity, being pure white marble, like an arch wreathed around with palm branches; and above it was a Venetian mirror, set in a silver frame, and surmounted by a dove with outspread wings. A large picture hung opposite the fire-place; it represented Sir Robert and Lady Evelyn, and had been painted soon after their marriage. He was dressed in a rich suit of purple velvet, a short cloak laced with gold, and his hair flowing down in waving curls, with a brow open as the morning; a firm, compressed lip, and an eye full of spirit and intelligence. The robe of the lady was of pearl-white satin, and her bright golden tresses played in small corkscrew ringlets round her face. Her hands, remarkable for their delicate size and colour, were filled with flowers, her fondness for which amounted to a passion—if that feverish word may be applied to

a love so gentle and innocent. The portrait was far more like the young cavalier just entering the chamber than the original who sat opposite, watching his once resemblance with a fixed and mournful gaze.

“ My youth is renewed,” said the old man, taking his son’s hand ; “ but draw near your seat, for my voice is weak, and I have yet much to say.” Robert placed a low stool beside, but his heart was too full to speak ; for daylight shewed more forcibly than ever the alteration in his parent. “ Your brother is my last and my greatest sorrow. He was to have joined you in Germany, but he loitered at Paris, and my first letter from my forgetful child was a confession of heavy debts incurred at the gaming-table. My remittance and my remonstrance were alike unanswered ; and I heard no more of Francis, till some prisoners, dragoons in Goring’s regiment, were brought hither—he was one of them. Great God ! but that my arm was then disabled, we should have met face to face in the battle ; and who may say on whose head the sin of blood might have rested ? With some difficulty I obtained a pardon ; but, weary of the restraint which circumstances rendered inevitable, he again left my roof ; and at this moment I know not how to find my wil-

ful child, even though the summons were to my death-bed."

Robert's first impulse was to frame excuses for his brother ; but what could he say, he who from childhood had so well known his reckless and selfish temper ? We talk of the influence of education—in what does it consist ? Here were two with the same blood flowing in their veins, born under the same roof, nursed by the same mother, play-mates in the same nursery, surrounded by the same scenes, pursuing the same studies, subject to the same rules, rewarded by the same indulgences—never till the age of eighteen having been parted for a day ; and yet were these two as opposite as if they had never known one circumstance in common. Robert was grave, thoughtful, and affectionate ; with the shyness always attendant on deep feeling, and the sensitiveness which is ever the best guard against wounding that of others—such have known the suffering too well to inflict it ;—enthusiastic in his admirations, imaginative in his tastes, and therefore solitary in his habits.

Frank had made love to all the pretty girls in the neighbourhood, while Robert was dreaming, in the summer glades of the New Forest, of the ideal mistress, whose perfection was poetry. High

toned in all his sentiments, from native generosity of disposition ; he was strict in principle, from habit ; he was too good and too honourable himself not to appreciate the uprightness and sincerity of his father. Francis, on the contrary, was lively, false, and uncertain ; his own pleasure, interest, or even ease, were ever uppermost in his mind. It was not that he would not be kind, but it seldom came into his head to be so. That certain sign of intense selfishness—he never gave any one credit for a good motive, for he believed no one better than himself. He had an exaggerated opinion of his own talents ; but his idea of ability was deceit. As there are some naturally deficient in the power of computation, others in an ear for harmony, so Francis Evelyn was utterly devoid of truth—he neither understood its moral beauty nor its actual utility. He felt no shame at detection—he only envied the discoverer's shrewdness, or his luck in finding a clew. He would neglect your wishes, wound your feelings,—partly, though, from very ignorance of their existence ; while he would do even mean things to win a momentary applause. Robert was proud, but of extraneous circumstances—of his ancient lineage, his noble father ; while the vanity of Francis centred in himself—he was vain of his person, his dress, or

any thing that was his. He would have felt none of his brother's sensitiveness in revealing the dearest and deepest secret of his heart; none of his remorseful fear of giving pain to his father.

Who has not observed in the daily intercourse of domestic life, that the very subject we have been striving to avoid, or planning to disclose, is sure to defeat our best-laid scheme, and start up before us when least expected? Thus it happened in the present case.

“ I had hoped,” said Sir Robert, turning suddenly from the window which commanded one of those wide panoramic views where hill and dale, dwelling, heath, and road, mingle together, “ to have drawn our old alliance with yonder house yet closer; but individual hatreds are the legacies left by civil war—strange how public can be stronger than private feeling! The play-mate of my boyhood, the companion of my first campaign in the Low Countries, he who wedded with my sister, is now worse than a stranger; we meet in the highway, and each passes on the other side. The present is embittered, not softened, by the memories of the past. Lord Maltravers has maintained an ostensibly neutral position; but all his predilections are in favour of the cavaliers. The consciousness that

he has not himself acted upon his principles, must create an invidious sentiment towards those who have. Alas, what slight cause will suffice to break up the friendship of years ! First came the disputed opinion, next the angry, then the cold word. Gradually we sought to avoid meeting, silence became habitual, and the epithets 'fanatic' and 'malignant' took the place of friend and brother. Yet, though the faces of his children are turned away when we meet, I see how very fair they are. I never look to the turrets of Avonleigh Abbey without somewhat of the kindliness of former days ; and I yet cling, Robert, to the thought of a union between one of those blue-eyed girls and yourself."

" Not so, my father," replied the youth ; and he hurriedly commenced his avowal. His voice grew firmer as he proceeded, he remembered the worthiness of the Italian maiden, and was encouraged by the affectionate interest with which his father listened to the narrative, which was only interrupted by a gentle sign of attention, or a kind look. A feeling of disappointment might arise in Sir Robert's mind as he heard this unexpected confession, but he was not one to weigh ambition against affection. He knew how, in his own case, the united heart had made the happy home ; and

he was sufficiently aware of the strength and depth of his son's character to know that his would be no transitory attachment. What, then, remained but pardon and approval? both of which were instantly given.

“ I lament that your Francesca should be a Catholic, chiefly from the circumstances which surround us. I have long since known that it is the faith, not the creed, which imports in religious belief. But in these days of fanaticism, that harsh and violent spirit is abroad, when men clothe their own angry passions in the garb of righteousness, and call persecution vindicating the honour of God. Alas! what must be their idea of the Almighty power, when they deem it needs assistance from the arm of flesh?”

But his son was too happy to heed aught but the present: to a naturally sincere person, the oppression of concealment is intolerable.

“ My dearest father, you then forgive me?”

“ What, my sage brother suing for forgiveness?—the very time for me to plead as well.” And a young cavalier, who had entered unperceived, dropt on one knee beside.

“ Francis!” they both exclaimed in equal surprise at the change in, and the suddenness of, his appearance. He had ever affected great

gaiety and richness of apparel, to mark his disdain of the Roundheads, whose custom was the reverse ; and his bright auburn hair had been carefully trained in long love-locks. Now he wore a sad-coloured cloak and a dark-grey suit, and his hair clipped close to the head, still, however, shewing a most unorthodox tendency to curl ; but his whole attire and bearing was in strict conformity with the severe and grave fashion of the period.

“ Nay, I will increase your wonder,” said he, laughing at their evident surprise ; “ I come from Whitehall, and trust, my dear father, you will approve of my conversion as much as if it had been your own work instead of Sir Harry Vane’s, with whom I came over from Paris. . . He desired me to greet you well in the name of the Lord,” added he, in a snuffling tone.

“ I understand this disguise, for such I cannot but consider it, as little as I approve of this mockery.”

“ Nay, dearest father,” returned the youth caressingly, “ blame me not that I have seen the folly of leaguing with your enemies, and that a little experience has taught me the necessity of conforming to general usage ; and surely to my partial parent I may indulge in the relief of a laugh at the solemn sanctity which I know he

himself holds but lightly. You drew your sword for higher motives than that hats should be worn without feathers, and sermons preached without surplices."

Sir Robert might have said, that if there be one habit more than another the dry-rot of all that is high and generous in youth, it is the habit of ridicule. The lip ever ready with the sneer, the eye ever on the watch for the ludicrous, must always dwell upon the external ; and most of what is good and great ever lies below the surface. But, rejoiced at his child's return, he had little inclination to moralise ; he was now again under his own roof, and he trusted, as affection ever trusts, that the future would make him all he could wish. Ah, the future ! the dreaming, the deceiving future, which promises every thing, and performs nothing—what would the present be without it ?

CHAPTER V.

“ And Love, that leaves where'er he lights
A burned or broken heart behind.”

MOORE.

BOTH the brothers were early risers, for Robert longed to wander through the old familiar scenes, and Francis had so many plans to carry into execution, that it was impossible to begin them too soon. Breakfast was hurried over, for the day was too bright for in-doors discourse ; the elastic spirits born of the glad clear atmosphere required motion, and the look wandered after the sunshine. At first they walked rapidly ; the glorious morning caused, as it were, its own neglect—they rather felt than saw the beauty around them ; but the buoyant step, the breath drawn lightly, and the freshness of eye and colour, shewed its influences were upon them.

It was now the first week in June, and a late spring had kept its beauty till all but merged

in summer. The steep and narrow path which they were threading wound down the side of a sloping heath, covered with the furze, now in full blossom—a sea of gold, with wave-like shadows, as the wind bent them to and fro. The golden expanse was only varied by knots of the green snake-grass, with its slender and feathery leaves—the most graceful of herbs. A peculiar perfume—for the scent of the furze, when first in bloom,

“ Might vie
With fabled sweets from purple Araby,”—

was on the air; while every now and then the yellow butterflies rose upon the wing, till then confounded with the glittering buds on which they rested. The silence would have been profound, had it not been broken by a low but perpetual murmur, like rippling water, which told that the fragrant artisans of summer, the bees, were busy gathering in their honey-harvest—at once labourers and manufacturers. Far in the distance lay the mighty forest, gloomy and solid, as if some dark mountain girdling in the valley. The sunshine went sweeping rapidly from the foreground to the utmost extent of the horizon; the shadow coiled up before it; gradually the breaks among the wood became distinct, the dense blackness

vanished, and the green woods shone out in the transparent atmosphere. The furze now became broken with patches of grass, and with occasional trees, and clumps of firs, whose sombre and wiry foliage had nothing in common with the cheerful aspect of their companions.

I cannot love evergreens—they are the misanthropes of nature. To them the spring brings no promise, the autumn no decline; they are cut off from the sweetest of all ties with their kind—sympathy. They have no hopes in common, but stand apart—very emblems for the fortunate and worldly man, whose harsh temper has been unsoftened by participating in general suffering, existing alone in his unshared and sullen prosperity. I will have no evergreens in my garden; when the inevitable winter comes, every beloved plant and favourite tree shall droop together—no solitary fir left to triumph over the companionship of decay.

Far as the boundaries of the forest spread on either side, it yet lay just below the heath; a few more windings of the little path brought them directly into one of its glades. The first indication was a change of the perfumed air; the furze-blossom was merged in the delicious breath of the may, now in full bloom—the most aromatic of English flowers. The extreme stillness, relieved

rather than interrupted by the bees plying their sounding wings, existed no longer. Every branch was musical with birds, whose perpetual chirpings served as chorus to the rich and prolonged cadences of the black-bird ; while the least stir not of their own making filled the air with fluttering pinions, which let in a shower of sunshine through the leaves.

One characteristic of the New Forest is its freedom from underwood ; hence the height of the stately trees is undiminished, and the sweep of the open place unbroken. Architecture, the first of sciences, took, in our northern world, its earlier lessons in the forest—the Gothic aisle and arch were found amid the beech and oak. The foliage was in the utmost variety of expanded spring ; the leaves of the beech, though destined to a deeper shade, wore already their polished green ; but the oak had yet put forth little more than those pale primrose-tinted buds, the faint promise of its future spreading shade. Here and there a shining holly reared its fairy “clump of spears,” and round many a leafless trunk the slender English ivy twined its graceful wreaths in such profusion as to mimic the tree on whose life it had fed. But the beauty of the glades was the hawthorn, in full luxuriance. The

slightest motion brought down a shower of white blossoms, and the sweet air grew yet sweeter as the brothers approached the more sequestered parts. The deer gazed on them for a moment with their large, tremulous eyes, and then bounded off, gradually slackening their graceful speed when a tree or a growth of fern served as a barrier; while here and there a pair of antlers were tossed up, glancing like ivory in the sun.

“ Every thing here is the very same as the morning I went away,” said Robert Evelyn; “ but, good heavens, the change in the country around! The house deserted, the field uncultivated, the peasant starting with a look of fear at the sound of your horse’s hoofs, have little in common with the England which I left. But here I feel at home again; I could almost dream that not a flower had faded, and not a leaf fallen these three years.”

“ Now,” returned Francis, “ begin to moralise according to your mood. Rob Cowley of some quaint phrase touching the mutability of man, and the immutability of nature. But here, where these old oaks look too respectable to enact the part of evesdroppers, I shall rather say, Out on the fanatic knaves that brought the country to this pass, with their seeing of visions, and dreaming

of dreams ! By the eyes of our beautiful Queen, I hate to look on their serge cloaks and close-cropped crowns."

" And yet, methinks," answered the other, " I could as ill have brooked the hypocrisy and the oppression more delicately clad in cloth of silver and embroidery of gold."

" Why, one would suppose you thought my father was listening," interrupted his brother. " Loyalty may well be an old song in England, when a young cavalier like yourself wears a sheathed rapier and a grave brow, and talks sagely of oppression !"

" I have lived long enough in Italy to loathe the tyranny of old prescription. What, there, is the result of the exclusive privilege of one class, and the hereditary bondage of another, and the ignorance of both—what but cruelty, indolence, and debasing superstition ? I stayed at Venice, and, even in that gay city my blood ran cold to retrace the crime and craft which are the staple of her annals. And yet her people were once free and bold, winning adventurous wealth from the sea, which they mastered. Now, to what a state of crippled slavery are they reduced ! and by what, but the depression of a gradual and secret despotism ? Ah ! my brother, we do well to watch our

birthright jealously ; the least invasion on the meanest peasant, the slightest encroachment of the powerful, are not matters to be neglected — such are the first steps of tyranny. Woe betide the people who allow such invasion on their freedom to gain courage from endurance, or strength from time ! ”

“ Out, out upon this oration, or homily I should rather call it, to suit the spirit of the time ! I have heard too much of the blessings of liberty not to hate their very name. I own to you I cannot force myself to care for the fancied rights of low-born churls whom I despise. Mankind have, from all antiquity, been divided into two classes — the ruling and the ruled ; why should we attempt to set all experience at defiance ? I see no cause for reversing the good old plan, provided I can manage to be one of the rulers. I will leave you a few noble sentiments (I hope you like the phrase) for our worthy father’s especial service ; but trust your practice will suit more with my own.”

“ I should, if you please, rather prefer my practice and my theory going together.”

“ Mere matter of taste. But surely I know that solid iron-grey horse, and its still more solid rider, Major Johnson ! take his entertainment on yourself.”

“ Nay !” exclaimed Robert, detaining him ; “ it will not task your courtesy much, for we can leave him in a few minutes—and I have so much to say to you.”

“ Why, to tell the truth,” resumed Francis, “ I have my own reasons for wishing to avoid an encounter with yonder sullen fanatic. As ill luck would have it, I was with Goring’s dragoons the night his house was burnt. Do not look so reproachfully ; we did but enter his hall for the joke of forcing the old Presbyterian into hospitality, when his refusal to drink the king’s health led to high words, and thence to hard blows. I did not draw till Edward Stukeley was killed by my side. I then cut down his opponent, who was Johnsone’s only son—I myself received a wound”—pointing to a slight scar on the temple—“ from his father. We were then separated ; but I hear he vows eternal vengeance against me. Now I care for his threats as little as I care for his anger ; but, come down as I am on my good behaviour, a broil is the last thing in the world that I desire—so I shall judiciously retreat. We shall meet again, if you will go home, whither I shall direct my steps.”

So saying, he turned into a narrow path, and soon left the stern horseman and his brother far behind.

Suddenly the way terminated in a little lonely glade, through which a small clear brook ran with a sweet low song, a perpetual and musical murmur, as the waves rippled over the white and blue pebbles which lay glittering below. On either side spread the moss thick and soft, and starred with a thousand coloured particles, red, gold, and purple, Nature's own delicate broidery. There was nothing of that luxuriance of blossom which had hitherto clothed the wood, for there were no hawthorns ; but the bog-myrtle imparted its tender fragrance, and the caressing honeysuckle wound round many an ancient trunk, odours exhaling from every fairy-like tube—fit trumpets for the heralds of Titania.

Bending down beside the brook, from whose bank she was gathering the moss, the slender outline of her form mirrored darkly on the stream, was a girl, lovely enough even for the lovely scene around. The grey stuff dress, the white cap, whose border was drawn close round the face, were such as a peasant would wear ; but there was about her not only that grace which nature and beauty give, but that softness and refinement which belong, if not to gentle blood, yet to gentle breeding. The pure white of her skin had known no exposure to the weather, and the fair and delicate

hands had obviously known no ruder task than their present employment. She did not look above eighteen, and yet the first bloom of youth was past; it was the complexion to which colour would naturally belong, and yet her cheek was pale, and the deep blue eyes had an expression of melancholy, fixed, but still not seeming to be their native expression.

Francis gazed for a moment on the exquisite profile, which was all he could see, and hesitated; it was an interview he had half resolved not to seek—but Lucy Aylmer looked more lovely than ever; and he sprang across the brook.

“Are you gathering moss for the linnet’s cage?” asked he, aware that the bird had been his own gift.

Lucy started from her bending attitude—a flush of beautiful delight upon her face. In a moment that most beloved voice went to her heart; her head sunk on his shoulder; and for a few minutes she had no thought, no feeling, but the intense happiness of seeing him again. Could he, could any one, be insensible to tenderness so guileless and yet so deep? Perhaps, too, the very consciousness of how little it was deserved, quickened affection with remorse; and at that instant Francis felt the love which had been weakened by absence,

and forgotten in change, spring up again with all the fervour of a new impulse.

Lucy Aylmer was the only child of a favourite attendant of Lady Evelyn's, and left an orphan when but three years' old. Lady Evelyn had always wished for a daughter, and she adopted as her own the beautiful little girl, whose docility and affection more than repaid the debt of gratitude for what, alas! was not kindness. Poor Lucy was only accustomed, not elevated to another sphere. Refinement of feeling belongs equally to every station, but refinement of taste must be matter of education. Every year, when she went to pay her annual visit to her father and grandmother, she found more and more how wide was the gulf between them. They had not a habit or an idea in common ; their pleasures were not her pleasures, and their hopes were not her hopes.

But it was not till Francis Evelyn came home that she felt the full wretchedness of her position. Robert, brought up under the same roof, was, as a brother, associated in her mind only with the pains and pleasures of childhood. Not so the young and handsome cavalier, who had for two years entirely resided with the distant relative, who died, bequeathing to him the wreck of a once princely fortune. Sir Robert bitterly reproached himself

for having consigned his child to another, when he saw the effect of too early initiation into profligacy, or, as Francis called it, knowledge of the world.

Frankness and confidence belong to youth ; and where experience comes too soon, it brings but half knowledge. The conviction of much evil in the heart should be learned at a later period, when we shall be aware also of much good. The worldly wisdom of the young is always of a harsh and bitter nature, making no allowance, and forgiving nothing — ever ready to attribute the ill motive, and holding suspicion to be penetration. Moreover, he was pained to perceive that the youth had no higher rule of action than worldly honour — honour which makes so many exceptions in favour of its pleasures. Principle was in his eyes but prejudice — and where he could not reason the right away, he ridiculed it.

Still he was so handsome, so graceful, so lively, that Sir Robert, making more excuses than he could well justify to himself, believed in the improvement he wished, and hoped every thing from the future.

And what was the impression produced on the innocent Lucy? — only that Francis Evelyn was the realisation of those dreams which had

of late cast a deeper tenderness over the page of the poet, and given a keener interest to the creation of the romance. Her creed of love was taken from Sir Philip Sydney's "Arcadia," and its real life grew out of the gentle tenderness native to her naturally melancholy temper—the result, perhaps, of a very solitary existence, and of health uncertain, if not positively weak.

Francis at first sought only amusement, and made love to her as he would to any other pretty girl, for he belonged to a school who considered gallantry as something between a relaxation and a science. It was, however, impossible for his feelings not to become interested—something of the truth and poetry of her nature communicated themselves to his own. Not that he was prepared to make one sacrifice for her sake, but then she expected none; her presence was a delight, and he left the future to chance. And Lucy, she too was happy; she hoped for nothing—she wished for nothing. To see him every day, to listen to him, to dwell with trembling joy on the slightest instance of preference, was enough to fill up the circle of her charmed existence.

But Lady Evelyn soon penetrated into her heart, and with a sorrow allied to anger. Alas for the weakness of human pride! Lady Evelyn

was a just, ay, and a kind woman ; yet she would sooner have seen the lovely and gentle creature—who had grown up at her knees, whose watchful eye had been for years the daily solace of a life broken by sickness—in the grave, than the bride of her son. She spoke to her, and harshly, while Lucy only wept, and felt the most guilty thing in the wide world. From that hour, love to the one seemed ingratitude to the other ; the disparity of their conditions haunted her perpetually. She was wretched and restless when Francis was away, but still more wretched when with him ; for the thought of his mother haunted her with all the bitterness of remorse.

Francis was enraged at the interference, and opposition made him more in earnest ; but just at this time, the civil war, which had hitherto left their part of the country comparatively quiet, arose with great virulence in their immediate vicinity. Early friends, and the superior gaiety of their camp, soon led the younger Evelyn to join the royalists ; and the burning of Major Johnsone's house compelled him to leave the neighbourhood. Perhaps, as bitter medicines strengthen the weakened system, it would have given force to Lucy's efforts at resignation could she have known how seldom did her image arise in her lover's memory. His

indifference was the only sorrow which her anxious fancy never conjured up. She felt more for what she believed must be his regret than for her own.

Lady Evelyn's death led to her leaving the hall for a home more than ever distasteful ; true, she was independent, even rich, for her station ; but for it she was utterly unfit.. She was too gentle, too unselfish, not to be beloved ; and though her father sometimes wished that she were more active, and her grandmother that she were less sad, still they were both proud and fond of her. They soon would have sorely missed the fairy hand whose birds and flowers gave a new cheerfulness to the house, and the sweet voice ever ready to sing their favourite old songs, or to read the sacred page, which, to use the poor old woman's words, "she did like an angel." But for herself the hope of life was gone. Every hour that she could, she passed in solitude, dreary, unoccupied, mournful solitude ;—what wonder was it that the colour left a cheek so often washed with tears ?

But the crimson just now was radiant enough. Recovering from the first almost shock of delight, she clasped her hands in mute thankfulness to Heaven. She, whose timid eyes drooped at his least look, now gazed on his countenance as if

she feared to lose that most beloved face, nor did she turn for one moment away. Scarcely could she believe in the reality.

“ You are lovelier than ever, my Lucy,” said Francis.

He was about to have added, that he had come forth on purpose to seek her, but the flattering falsehood died on his lips—for his life he could not at that moment have deceived her even in a trifle.

“ Ah, Francis! your mother!” exclaimed she, turning pale; “ I must leave you.”

This was easy to say; but where the heart is reluctant, the steps linger. What needs it to repeat that gentle discourse which all can either imagine or remember? Their interview was, however, brief; for Francis was little desirous of a discovery, and he knew he was expected by both father and brother. It was long before Lucy left that little lonely dell; and when she did, it was with a sensation of passionate happiness beating at her heart which no fear for the future, no consciousness of disparity, could restrain. Ah, how little suffices to make earth a paradise in the young and eager eyes of early and unsuspecting love!

Francis was met by his brother just at the entrance of the wood; for Robert was too full of

enjoyment in visiting all his early haunts not to desire a companion who would at least listen to the buoyant overflow of pleasant remembrances.

Whenever the scene of a narrative changes, it has been a custom, venerable from its antiquity, to leave the hero in some danger or dilemma. With all our respect for good old rules, we must here reverse the practice, and leave ours both in content and security, while we return to Italy and Francesca, whom we left to that drear absence whose passive loneliness is ever the lot of woman.

CHAPTER VI.

“Get rich—honestly, if you can—but, at any rate, get rich.”

Useful Advice.

“Oh! Francesca, such news!” exclaimed Marie Mancini, bounding into the old hall, and followed, though at a slower pace, by her sister; “come, put aside your embroidery, and congratulate us. My father’s scruples have yielded to my uncle’s wishes, nay commands, and we depart at once for France.”

“Alas!” replied Francesca, “you can scarce expect me to rejoice over an event which will part us so utterly!”

“Not so,” interrupted the gentle voice of Henrietta; “you must join us; the Cardinal’s letters are full of kindness—he seems anxious to indulge our least wishes—surely he will not deny us our earliest and dearest friend. Think, too, what his patronage may effect for Guido!”

“ And what the young nobles of France may say to your dark eyes ! ” added Marie.

“ Is it true,” said Guido, who had just entered “ that you are about to leave Italy—and us ? ”

“ Yes,” answered Marie, “ we are like the knights of old, about to go forth and conquer.”

She paused, for she felt rebuked by the earnest and melancholy gaze of the young sculptor. Marie loved him as much as it was in her nature to love—more than she suspected herself. It was with a flushed cheek and glittering eye that she let him draw her towards the window, while she listened to a passion pleaded with all the fervour of the South, and made beautiful by an imagination which turned all it touched to poetry. True it is that the innate buoyancy of the as yet unbroken spirit soon rebounds from the pressure of sorrow ; nevertheless, it is in youth that sorrow is most keenly felt. Time, of which so little has been measured, seems so very long—we soon learn the worldly lesson, that friends are easily replaced, and still more easily forgotten. We become accustomed to change—we grow hardened to regret—and in after-years look back with surprise, nay, even disdain, at the poignant grief with which we first parted from our early companions. We never again form those open, eager, and confiding attachments.

It was late in the autumn when the Mancinis departed; and drearily did the ensuing months pass with Francesca and Guido. The season, too, added its gloom. In our northern climes we have comfort and even gaiety with winter; there the cheerful fireside and the hospitality of Christmas make that period a sort of rallying point for the year. But where summer forms so large a portion of the enjoyment of the people—where all the habits are those of a warm climate—where all ordinary avocations of life are carried on in the open air, a long and severe winter is tedious indeed. The first letter they received was from Marie; their next was from Henrietta, who earnestly advised their coming to Paris. This was rendered impossible by the fixed attachment of their grandfather to his present residence, whose habits of seclusion were become more engrossing than ever.

“I sometimes believe,” said Guido, as, one cold, raw evening they sat beside the hearth, illumined by the red glare of the burning pine-boughs, “that the thing we call happiness, exists not. Its desire is implanted in our hearts, its promise dazzles our eyes; but its reality is unknown. I look back to each moment I have experienced of enjoyment—how was it ever mingled with fever and with

fear ! I remember hearing, that in the East the clear and azure waters seem to flow before the weary and parched traveller ; yet a little further, and on he urges his weary way, but in vain—the fair stream is a delusion. Even thus happiness is the mirage which leads us over the desert of life, ever fated to end in deceit and disappointment. Young, beautiful, and innocent, are you happy, Francesca ? ”

She turned her face towards him, silently—it was glittering with tears.

“ And what is it that we want ? Wealth ! ” continued the youth ; “ had I possessed but a portion of my house’s heritage, I should not be forced to picture to myself Marie but as surrounded by the gay flatterers of a foreign court. And you, Francesca—need you have feared the English noble’s denial, could the bride have brought gold instead of a true and loving heart ? ”

“ You are right ! ” exclaimed the aged Carrara, who had, unperceived, been a witness to their discourse ; “ gold is the earthly deity, to whom is intrusted the destinies of humanity. It is power, it is pleasure, it is love ; for even affection may be bought by gratitude. What can a king give to his bravest but wealth ? How can the lover surround the loved with the lovely but with wealth ? Nay,

will it not," added he, with a scarce perceptible sneer, "buy even salvation from our holy church? There is only one thing on earth more glorious, and that is science; science, which can master the subtle spirit, and force it to enter even the most worthless substances. It is now before me; the toil of a life is near its completion; how mightily will one moment repay the vigils of years! Ay, my children, be wild, be uncurbed in your wishes; little dream ye how near you are to their fulfilment!"

The old man's pale face gleamed with excitement, his wan cheek was flushed, his eyes kindled with fire, and his step was buoyant, like that of youth, as he ascended the winding staircase which led to his solitary tower. The young are easily carried away by whatever appeals to their imagination; and the cousins now began to build golden and aërial castles, with a vivacity the reaction of their previous despondency.

"Holy mother! what is that?" ejaculated Francesca, as an explosion, like a clap of thunder bursting directly over the palace, shook the very ground beneath their feet. Both sprang to the door; but the night, though cold, was clear, the moon shone large and bright in the deep blue sky; and all again was profound silence, when Guido exclaimed—

“ Surely that is a most unusual light from the turret !”

The windows of the tower were illuminated with a sudden blaze, where usually glimmered but one solitary spark. Both rushed towards the staircase, down which, like waves, rolled the eddying smoke ; fortunately, there were large gaps in the dilapidated walls, or they never could have made their way. The last flight of steps was lighted from the open door, which the shock had forced from its hinges. A large clear flame, but evidently subsiding, arose on the hearth ; various vessels and instruments, mostly broken, were scattered round ; and thrown with his face on the floor lay their grandfather. Guido caught him up in his arms, and bore him to the lower chamber, where the noise had assembled their two servants. The features still wore their expression of eagerness and triumph—but set and rigid, for life had departed from them for ever.

The danger of the palace was too imminent for neglect ; and leaving the body, beside which Francesca was kneeling, Guido again ascended the steps of the tower ; but the smoke had nearly dispersed, the blaze on the hearth was flickering and faint, while the pale moonlight shone quietly into that room of disappointment and death, as it had

a thousand times shone on its lonely and deluding pursuits. Again he descended; and the same reddening pine-boughs that had lit his own and Francesca's countenance, in all the animation of their late discourse, now lighted the ghastly features of the dead.

CHAPTER VII.

“ The future, that sweet world which is hope’s own,
Lay fair before.”

Anon.

FRANCE now became the land of promise to the Carraras ; their youthful connexion with the nieces of Cardinal Mazarin might have encouraged the most ambitious hopes ; but they knew too little of the world to be worldly : Guido dwelt only on the thought that he should again see Marie Mancini ; and Francesca remembered that it was so much nearer England. Her expectations were, however, of a more subdued kind—the very depth of a woman’s affection casts its own shadow, and love and fear are with her twin-born. With a natural sensitiveness, she exaggerated dangers, and with natural timidity mistrusted the effects of absence. Months had passed away, and she had heard nothing of Evelyn. Alas ! how many old stories had she been told of change and falsehood !

But her spirit was firm as gentle. She had been from childhood less her grandfather's favourite than her cousin, and from the very earliest age all the household cares had fallen to her share. Thus, habits of thought and activity were forced upon her ; she soon acquired that self-reliance which exertion ever brings ; and at the age of seventeen she united a sweet seriousness, a mild energy, with all the guileless simplicity of youth.

Impassioned and imaginative, living in an ideal world, little broken in upon by the small sacrifices of daily life, Guido was far less fitted for the ordinary struggle of existence ; he possessed genius in the highest sense of the word—*inherent, spiritual, and creative*. In hand, heart, and mind, he was alike a poet. But, alas ! those who are heirs of the future, destined to fill the earth with the immortal and the beautiful, what is their share in the present ? the sad and the weary path—the bowed-down and broken heart ! Look at the golden list of the few who have left behind them the bright picture, the god-like statue, the inspired scroll, to whom we yet owe—ay and now pay our debt of gratitude—what was each life but a long and terrible sacrifice to futurity ? But the young look to the goal, not to the road ;

and well it is for them so to do ; they would never reach it but for such onward gaze.

Their few arrangements were soon made, hastened by a letter from Henrietta, now Duchesse de Mercœur ; and they found themselves in possession of a degree of wealth, which, however moderate, was sufficient to preclude any thing like dependence. It was a bright morning when they embarked at the port of Leghorn. The blue sea spread far away, till lost, as it were, in light ; the shore lay glittering behind, and the sunshine seemed to fall like a blessing around. The buoyant atmosphere gives its own lightness to the spirits ; and our young voyagers felt as if the beautiful day were the augury of the future.

Yet, at that very time the power of their expected patron seemed on the verge of final overthrow. Cardinal Mazarin had, for the second time, been forced into exile by the Fronde, and Paris was in a state of equal confusion and excitement — excitement, that peculiarly Parisian word. The disturbances had commenced, like those of England, in the refusal of the parliament to sanction an obnoxious tax ; but here all resemblance ended. The position of the two countries was, indeed, entirely opposite. In the English parliament the tax was refused on great and gene-

ral principles; in the French, in consequence of its immediate pressure and hardship. In France, the parliament soon became a mere engine in the hands of a few high-born and ambitious men, who had nothing in common with its interests, which were those of the people. In England the House of Commons was a powerful body, sufficing to itself, and whose members had common cause in the privileges for which they contended. The truth is, our island had far preceded her Gallic neighbour in knowledge and liberality. The great body of Englishmen were far better educated than their compeers on the other side the channel. The Reformation had thrown open the rich extent of classic literature; the age had been fertile in those great men who give their own impetus to the national mind; and habits of religious led also to political discussion. Moreover, one greatest advantage in all questions of government, the spring of action was no vain love of change, but a just desire of confirming olden privileges. The claimants went back upon what they believed to be their rights. Perhaps a more able and intelligent body of men were never collected together—strong in conviction and ability —than that which presented the memorable petition of rights.

But that hope is the most enduring of mortal feelings, what profound discouragement would it throw on the noblest and most promising efforts of humanity, to think that men so intellectual and so upright could be swayed, in the long-run, by the thirst of dominion ; and, carried away from all sober sense by the wildest and most fanatic enthusiasm, that a spirit of fierce and narrow religious persecution should be one of the chief legacies which they bequeathed to posterity !

But neither with the just sense of right with which our struggle was commenced, nor with the mad fanaticism with which it continued, had the division of the Fronde any thing in common. The parliament refused to register the royal edict because the tax was a present grievance, a hardship immediately felt. But they had not that only material for resistance—a strong and rising middle class—a class whose prosperity must ever grow out of commerce. Their opposition became armed rebellion, because upheld and stimulated by those to whom they gave all they wanted —a sanction and a name.

The wars of La Fronde were in reality the struggle of Cardinal de Retz for the post of Cardinal Mazarin. The Coadjutor—for so he was then entitled—was the extraordinary man of his

time. Disliking the clerical profession, which his family obliged him to adopt, he was as unprincipled as those necessarily must be upon whom hypocrisy is forced. It is difficult to imagine a more thoroughly bad person. Profligate, selfish, false, and profane, his moral character had but one excuse—that of circumstance. His hypocrisy was matter of necessity, and his faults were those of his day; but his talents—perhaps the surest mark of talents—were eminently suited to the times which called them forth. Ready-witted, he had a resource for every emergency; and whatever was his purpose, he perceived intuitively the best methods of effecting it. He was both eloquent and persuasive, and few men ever better understood the delicate science of flattery. A temper originally violent was kept under by the strong curb of interest; though what it naturally was when unchecked by the all-potent fear—that of consequences—may be inferred by an anecdote.

The Princess de Guimenée deserted Paris on the first breaking out of the disturbances. De Retz's connexion with her had been of long continuance; her timidity savoured, therefore, of treachery. On her return, he himself states, “I was so transported with rage, that I caught her by the throat!”

What must have been his self-control, when, amid all the thwarting and vexatious affairs by which he was surrounded, in scarce a single instance did passion hurry him beyond the bounds of prudence! La Fronde was equally of his fomenting and his continuing. With the parliament for his pretext, and some prince of the blood for his puppet, he twice drove his rival into exile, governed a violent party, and made his way to power by the sole force of his own genius.

Nothing more sensibly shews the veneration and the obedience of the French for the royal authority, than that a foreigner, obnoxious to all ranks, and mediocre in talent, was supported by it against all opposition. Well might De Retz exclaim, "Give me but the king on my side for a single day!" Another striking difference between the two countries was the nullity of female influence in the one, and its extreme importance in the other. True that in London a brewer's wife headed a godly company of her sex, and presented a petition against popery, and that Mr. Pym commended their anxiety, and voted them the thanks of the house. True, also, that in Scotland the old women shewed much activity in pelting the ungodly with the stools whereon they sat at meeting. But these absurdities were of

no real consequence. In France the dames of La Fronde were equally active with its cavaliers ; every intrigue passed through their hands, and the Duchesse de Longueville's part in the drama was quite as effective as that of the Prince of Condé, her brother. The results of this feminine interference were inevitable—vacillation, absurdity, and profligacy. The northern and southern hemispheres are not more divided than those allotted to man and woman—public and private life.

There is no period of history which records the authority of the gentler sex without also recording its injurious effects. Leaving out the darker shades of the picture, are not impulse and sentiment the two mainsprings of all female action ? and can aught be more mischievous in matters of politics or business ? A king, the history of whose youth is that of a few insipid flirtations—a queen, weak, bigoted, and obstinate—a court rent by petty factions—a detested minister—a capital in a state of insurrection, and suffering both from inundation and famine ;—such was the country, and such the state of affairs, where our young Italians expected to find all the rainbow dreamings of youth and hope realised. Something of this, however, they heard in the

progress of their voyage, during which their principal companion was a little French painter called Bournonville.

If self-content form happiness, Corregio Bournonville was the happiest of men. Perfectly convinced that miniature-painting was the most important pursuit in life, he was equally persuaded that he was the finest miniature-painter in the world. Character he had none; for he was simple as a child — experience taught him nothing, being one of those in whom the faculty of comprehension is utterly wanting. His only remaining characteristic was an extravagant deference to rank, mingled, too, with an odd sort of patronage. “I to whom the court will owe its immortality!” was with him a common phrase. For hours he would dilate, with an enthusiasm only broken in upon by emotion, how he had relieved the monotony of colouring in Anne of Austria’s picture (taken during the second year of her widowhood, when she wore a suit of entire grey silk) by painting her as Juno, and introducing a peacock. He was touched even to tears when he mentioned that her majesty graciously condescended to resume the use of powder for that occasion expressly, she not having worn it since the death of the king. “Yes, her grace had

her hair frizzed and powdered entirely on my account!" Neither was he less animated in describing the young monarch, whom he had represented as Jupiter, dressed in purple velvet broidered in gold, a flaxen periwig floating over his shoulders, an eagle by his side, and a thunder-bolt in his hand.

Guido's ideas of these personifications were somewhat at variance with Monsieur Corregio Bournonville's; but, naturally shy and silent, he was little inclined to dispute the point; and, long before the voyage was over, they were the best possible friends. The ignorance of the young Italians was their best recommendation; it gave the Frenchman an agreeable feeling of superiority, and, by a very ordinary process, he liked them because he was useful to them. Thus, when on their arrival in France, they found that Mazarin had a second time been forced into exile by the Fronde, he insisted on their making his house at least their temporary home. Dreary, indeed, was their journey to Paris; want and desolation appalled them on every side. In addition to the distress occasioned by intestine troubles, the severity of the season, and the scarcity of provisions, the Seine had recently overflowed its banks, and the horrors of inundation were added to those of war.

and famine. Groups of shivering wretches sat by the road-side, and more than one unburied corpse shewed what inroads distress had made on humanity. So strongly is sympathy with the dead implanted in our nature, that when those last sad offices of affection and decency are neglected, life indeed is in its last despair.

It was mid-day when they arrived in Paris ; and though Bournonville's house was near the Barrier de Sergens, they saw enough to shew them what excitement prevailed through the city. Groups of citizens (armed apparently with the heir-looms of the wars of the league, so heavy were some of the two-handled swords, and so antiquated were the long and lumbering pikes) were scattered round ; and if they were to be as violent in action as they were in gesture and discourse, the future might well be matter of apprehension. But Bournonville, who had witnessed the day of the barricades in the first La Fronde, looked on with great composure. "They will disperse," said he, "about four o'clock ; *nos bons bourgeois ne s'en desheureront jamais*. They must go home to their soup, *couête qui couête*."

A shrill sound of childish voices rose upon the air ; and whether from the folly or the carelessness of their parents, some of the clamourers

actually carried daggers; and what appeared to them a holyday, had its enjoyment increased by a sort of self-importance. Last of all, crying "*Point de Mazarin!*" with the whole power of his voice, and dragging after him a huge spear, whose weight greatly impeded his progress, came a boy of some five or six years old. Alas! the young patriot was soon taught a wholesome lesson of submission to the powers that be; for from a corner-house out came his mother, a slight, active, viragoish-looking woman. She seized the juvenile Gracchus, with a sharp question of "*Petit vaurien! what do you do in the streets?*" and having duly enforced her words with a box on the ear, dragged the child home, still tenaciously clinging to his spear.

The travellers were welcomed to Bournonville's house by the gouvernante Madelon, a bustling, goodnatured Normande, whose pyramidal white cap and large gold ear-rings were the delight of her heart; next came the house, and after that her master;—all objects of a most deep and unfeigned attachment.

Bournonville's first step was to ask Madelon a few questions, and then hurry to his painting-room. "Every thing has changed since I left, and I must change every thing too. The beauties

of La Fronde will soon ask of me chains for posterity, and they must not encounter their rivals."

The first objects that caught the Italians' attention were portraits of Henriette and Marie Mancini.

"How she is improved!" exclaimed Guido, gazing on the face of the last.

Francesca almost unconsciously asked herself how much of this improvement might be owing to the courtly flattery of the painter.

Bournonville allowed them no time for remark. Hastily he turned their faces to the wall, and placed before them two others — one whose large melancholy blue eyes and languid fairness bespoke the Duchesse de Longueville, while the other had the perfect features and dark oriental orbs of Mademoiselle de Chevreuse. These two heroines of La Fronde being placed in the most conspicuous lights, the artist proceeded to other arrangements.

"The King may remain," muttered he, brushing the dust from the periwig of the royal Jupiter; "the Queen is just as well in the shade — this sketch of Mademoiselle will partially hide her. Now, a few nobodies and messieurs of La Fronde may come as soon as they please. And so, my children, for some dinner!"

And the man who had just been engaged in the most time-serving neglect of former, and a most cringing anticipation of new patrons, became forthwith the kind and hospitable host of strangers who had no claim upon him beyond their own isolated situation. Consistency is a human word, but it certainly expresses nothing human.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ ‘Tis he—what doth he here?”—*Lara.*

THE following evening, Bournonville and his guests were seated round the large old-fashioned hearth, whose wooden chimney-piece represented the death of St. Louis, rudely carved in the same material, and once painted white, now brown with smoke and time. Madelon sat in the corner with her eyes closed; but her hands moved, as if telling her large oaken beads were a mechanical effort. Guido and Francesca were in attitudes at least of attention, though the thoughts of each were far away; and the painter was dilating on the fair beauty of Mademoiselle de Longueville, and the dark beauty of Mademoiselle de Chevreuse, at both of whose portraits he had been assiduously employed during the day. Henriette and Marie

de Mancini, his former inexhaustible themes, seemed to have entirely escaped his memory.

Suddenly the whole party were alarmed by a violent knocking at the door. The sound of armed men with their heavy footsteps and clanging swords, mingled with oath and threat, were distinctly heard; and the bolt was scarcely withdrawn, before in rushed a party of about twenty, who appeared both prepared and determined to take possession of the place. Guido drew the slight rapier that hung by his side; but his guard was instantly beaten down by the leader of the band, who, however, in so doing, dropped the cloak from his face.

“ M. D’Argenteuil !” exclaimed Bournonville, “ surely this is not the respect you shew to the fine arts. Even during the ferocious siege of Rhodes, Demetrius honoured the house of Protagenes the painter. Will you, a Christian and a gentleman, allow yourself to be outdone in courtesy by a heathen ?”

D’Argenteuil laughed. “ Not so, my prince of colours. I knew not of your return; and this house commands the barrier which we have some reason to expect will be attacked to-night. Most of my men will disperse as sentinels; and you

must find room by your fireside for myself and a friend or so."

Bournonville was profuse in politeness and protestations. "I have yet left a flask or two of fine old Burgundy; and I think I know what fair saint will best honour the health," added he, with a most insinuating smile.

But in the meantime a far different scene had been going on in the chamber. Francesca, as the door opened, had shrunk to the side of Madelon, when her attention, as the tumult ceased, was caught by a young cavalier who was gazing earnestly upon her. The light fell more fully on his face—she could not be deceived—she sprang forward, and, laying her hand on his arm, exclaimed in English, "Evelyn, dearest Evelyn! have you forgotten Francesca Carrara?"

"Mr. Evelyn!" exclaimed Guido, at the same moment.

Lost in delight and surprise, the young Englishman stood for an instant motionless; when, recovering from his astonishment, he caught the beautiful hand extended towards him, and, kissing it, eagerly whispered, "Francesca, the lovely Francesca, I am too happy!"

Turning to Guido, he expressed his pleasure

at meeting him also ; and then, addressing a few words in a low voice to D'Argenteuil, took his place by the fire.

The soldiers were dismissed, the Burgundy produced, and, despite their forcible entry, the new arrivals were as much disposed to its cheerful enjoyment as if they had been old friends bidden to a festival ; Evelyn, Francesca, and Guido, occupying a little nook to themselves.

“ I will not tell you to-night,” said the young Englishman, “ of the disappointment and difficulties which awaited my arrival at home ; suffice it to say”—looking towards Francesca—“ that henceforth I shall look but to myself for happiness. I am now engaged in an affair which, if it succeed, will enable me to make my own terms.”

“ Why do you not speak in Italian ?” said Francesca, who was something chilled by the over-frankness with which her lover alluded to feelings which with her were so sacred and silent.

“ In good sooth, my sweet saint, my stay in England and here has somewhat roughened my tongue for the words of the soft south. I must learn them again from you.”

Francesca sighed, and thought how little she had forgotten the English she had learned for his sake.

Evelyn proceeded to narrate his business in Paris. “ Only that the majority of people are idiots, and prefer their fancies to their interests, these cavalier and roundhead differences might soon be settled. My plan is perfect, on the old principle that *les extrêmes touchent*. I propose to unite the opposites, and conclude our civil wars like a comedy—with a marriage: Charles Stuart and Frances Cromwell !”

“ So degrading a connexion !” interrupted Guido.

“ The daughter of his father’s murderer !” exclaimed Francesca.

“ Ay, ay, prejudice and fine feelings, the old Scylla and Charybdis of action,” returned Evelyn, with something between a smile and a sneer; “ if the brewer’s daughter has not the blood of the Stuarts and Plantagenets mingling in her veins, she is but the more ennobled by an alliance with him who has. As for ‘ his father’s murderer,’ such harsh expressions are never used, beautiful Francesca ! We must talk of the force of circumstances, of imperative necessity, and find fault with the cruel horoscope which ordained such a fate. Charles Stuart will suddenly have seen the errors of his royal father. Cromwell’s conscience will equally suddenly be touched with the desire of re-

paration. He will perceive that the innocent should not suffer for the guilty. The converted king's return will be another crowning mercy ; and Frances Cromwell will bring three kingdoms for her dower. I much misdoubt me if our royal master would not take her for but the revenues of one of them."

"Well arranged," said D'Argenteuil, joining in their conversation ; "but a man's circumstances must be desperate before he attempt to mend them by marriage. Why, your prince has already three alliances in agitation. There is his mother trying flattery in every shape to win for him the good graces and fair domains of our princess, Mademoiselle de Montpensier."

"If it be true what I hear," said the Chevalier de Joinville, the other remaining cavalier, she had better take him. When she ordered the cannon of the Bastile to be turned on the royal troops, at the sound of the first gun, Cardinal Mazarin only remarked, 'Ah ! Mademoiselle has killed her husband.' Gallantly as he has played it, De Retz has a losing game : the Condé is against him, and his reliance on Orleans — we all know what that is."

"Your young monarch," continued D'Argenteuil, "must then resume his devoirs to one of Mazarin's nieces."

“They say,” returned Joinville, “that our own Louis is his rival there. *Ma foi*, the subtle Italian knows well how to weave his net. If the fair Mancini manages the son as her uncle has managed the mother, France is but a heir-loom to the Mazarins.”

“If we were but as civilised as those Turks—who, but that we zealous ones consider you papists as the more pressing danger, would doubtless ere this have been the objects of another crusade—all these marriages would be easily arranged. Charles Stuart might have one wife for money—your own Montpensier, for example; another for his home interests—my Frances Cromwell; a third—the Mancini—for a foreign alliance; while let the fourth be chosen for love, unless there be any other advantage to be gained.”

“Mr. Evelyn never makes unnecessary difficulties,” replied D’Argenteuil, in a sarcastic tone. “But the night is far advanced; I think we need now dread no attack; so I drink my farewell, and thanks to Monsieur Corregio Bournonville for his hospitality.”

D’Argenteuil set down the cup, and, bending courteously to the strangers, withdrew.

Evelyn lingered for a moment, took from Francesca a few early violets—Madelon’s gift,

the first of their small garden—and, placing them beside the little bunch of straw which hung from his button-hole, “They will be scarce withered ere I am again at your feet,” and followed his companions.

“Why, Evelyn,” exclaimed Joinville, “in what profound mystery you had enveloped your beautiful Italian! Remember I am not on honour, and shall do my utmost to rival you.”

“I pity all who take fruitless trouble,” said Evelyn, carelessly.

“I understand now,” added D’Argenteuil, “what made our volunteer so ready to accompany us. I believe, however, Mr. Evelyn usually has some reason for his actions.”

“Could I give a fairer one?” laughingly replied Evelyn.

D’Argenteuil was, however, wrong in his supposition. The young Englishman had only joined his party from mere love of adventure, for he was recklessly brave; and Francesca’s arrival in Paris was as little known to him as to the rest of the party.

The heavy door had scarcely closed, when Francesca, leaning her head on Guido’s shoulder, burst into a passion of tears.

“Is he not altered?” asked she, in an almost inaudible voice.

“You must make allowances,” said her cousin, soothingly, “for the different manner of the countries; he has been talking carelessly, and before others.” But he thought not what he said, and both retired to a sad and reflective pillow.

So much for anticipation in this life! Had Francesca been asked that morning what would give her the most perfect happiness, she would unhesitatingly have replied, her meeting with Evelyn. They had met, and she was sorrowful even to weeping. Ah! hope fulfilled is but a gentler word for disappointment.

CHAPTER IX.

“ History is but a tiresome thing in itself—it becomes the more agreeable the more romance is mixed up with it.”

Crotchet Castle.

“ CHILDREN and fools speak truth,” muttered Evelyn, as he parted that night from Joinville, and meditated on the return of Mazarin, which the other had so lightly prophesied. “ If so, I am paying court in the wrong quarter; and the promises made by De Retz of assistance to our cause, when he becomes minister, are as vain as promises usually are. Well! I will attend the meeting at the Duke of Orleans’ to-morrow, and the gales of La Fronde must blow fairer than they do now for me to sail by. The safe way will be to leave Paris; — but then that lovely Francesca! I am much mistaken if the least hint, backed by that high-sounding word duty, will not be sufficient excuse for absence; and if

Mazarin returns, her connexion with his nieces may be useful."

The next morning, Joinville was the first person he encountered in the ante-chamber of Monsieur.

"Have you heard the news?" exclaimed he, eagerly; "the Prince of Condé has left Paris, and the twenty-first is talked of as being the day fixed for the king's entrance. The troops are advancing every hour, and Mazarin is omnipotent with Turenne." And the young Important, in his delight at being the first to communicate a piece of intelligence, seemed to forget that it was the utter ruin of his party that he was announcing.

Evelyn made his way to the inner room, where an assembled group were already engaged in conference; but the voices were languid, and the speakers hesitated; each seemed waiting for the other's opinion before he would venture his own. Gaston of Orleans was seated in a fauteuil, wrapped in a loose dressing-gown, every thing about him betokening an indolent love of ease. He had that striking likeness which characterises all the Bourbons—and his first appearance was dignified; but when he spoke or moved, this dignity, at least on ordinary occasions, was entirely lost. He had a peculiarity in speaking,

strikingly indicative of his character. He began in a clear voice and a decided tone, but before he arrived at the end of a sentence, his voice sunk so low as to be almost inaudible, and the meaning became as confused as the sound. Never was there a man less calculated for the chief of a party ; rash in his commencements, he was never prepared for their consequences. He had no confidence in others ; how could he, when he had none in himself? Without judgment to foretell, or nerve to meet, the dangers his impetuosity had provoked, he never saw things as they actually were—but usually took the view suggested by any one at his elbow, to whom habit, or even chance contact, gave a passing authority.

Marguerite of Lorraine was seated at his side. Thin, pale, with that worn look which indicates the broken spirit, or the habit of bodily suffering, save in the still fine outline of feature, there was slight remains of the beauty for which her husband had dared so much, and yet endured so little. She leant back feebly in her chair, like a confirmed invalid ; but there was a feverish flush upon her cheek, and a sparkle in her eye, that betokened the keenest interest in what was going on. A grave, quiet, and elderly man, the Presi-

dent, De Bellicore, stood near ; and between him and Monsieur was the Coadjutor.

De Retz was now in the prime of life, and his heavy ecclesiastical dress could not disguise his light and even elegant figure, while his feet and hands were of feminine size and delicacy ; but here ended his personal advantages. His face was plain, his brow was dark and knit, while the clear grey eye was deep-seated, stern, and piercing ; his complexion was sallow, and the lines of his countenance at once harsh and worn. Monsieur was speaking when they entered, with much animation :

“ War rests with myself—I have but to give the signal, and we shall fight with greater spirit than ever. Ask the Cardinal.”

“ Doubtlessly,” said De Retz, bowing with the most passive politeness.

“ The people are with me ?”

“ Yes.”

“ M. Le Prince would return at my request.”

“ Your wish would be his law.”

“ The Spanish army await but my bidding to advance.”

“ So we have every reason to suppose,” replied the Cardinal, in the same uninterested tone of

mere and necessary acquiescence to the assertion of a superior.

The Duke, who was quite unprepared for these unlimited affirmatives, paused ; for he had expected difficulties to have been raised and obstacles to have been confessed, to which he might have yielded with something of a grace. But now, that none denied the power to which he laid claim, it seemed inevitable that he must propose acting upon it. Madame could restrain herself no longer :

“ Out upon it, Gaston !” exclaimed she ; “ we are not playing Italian comedy. This is just like Trivelin reproaching Scaramouch, ‘ What fine things I should have said, if you had but had the sense to contradict me !’ It matters little what you can do, the question is, what you will do ?”

The Coadjutor turned towards her, his whole face changed by its altered expression. It was impossible to imagine any thing more sweet, more winning, than his smile ; it had all the effect of sudden sunshine. Still he remained silent—when Monsieur, turning towards him somewhat sullenly, “ Well, what do you say ? is there any safety in treating with the court ?”

“ None ; unless your highness make your

own security," he replied, with an energy the very reverse of his former manner.

"But you told me the King would not return to Paris without compromising with me."

"I told you such was the Queen's assertion; but I also gave you my reasons for doubting that such was the intention."

"I know Anne of Austria's smooth-lipped falsehoods of old. All women are false enough—but she has dissimulation for a whole sex. Verily there must now be some surpassingly honest, for she has engrossed the portion of deceit allotted to many. Why, I had a letter this morning from her, filled with professions of forgiveness and of friendship."

"Your grace best knows, from experience, what weight to attach to the Queen's honied words," observed De Retz, who needed no further clue to Monsieur's present irresolution.

"Does it not," asked the President, De Bellincore, "touch his grace's honour to ensure some safety to the city and to the adherents who have risked much in his cause?"

"What would you advise?" exclaimed the Duke, directing his question to the Coadjutor.

"I venture not on advice," replied De Retz;

but I will venture on laying before Monsieur the bearings of his present position. Our difficulty is to avoid being blamed as a faction, willing to draw out the civil war to all eternity, or stigmatised as traitors, ready to betray their party for their own advantage. We have to advise you between peace and war; but with yourself the choice must rest. If peace, you must submit at once to the Queen, and allow the unconditional return of the court, involving that of Mazarin—with all Paris at his mercy. He, however, will not be vindictive; punishment suits neither with his temper nor his interest. But you know Anne of Austria, and may guess how her native bitterness will be excited by the violence of Servien, the harshness of Tettier, the impetuosity of Fouquet, and the foolishness of Oudedey. And all this, it will be said, the Duke of Orleans might have prevented by an effective treaty, securing an act of indemnity."

" But how am I to obtain such treaty?" asked Monsieur, in a querulous tone.

" By active and defensive measures; which brings us to the second question of war. If war there be, it must be made as if there was no such thing as peace. You must arouse the good city of Paris by a personal appeal—recall the Prince de Condé, and act together in strict unity. You

must confirm your treaty with the Spaniard ; and, my life on the issue, you dictate your own terms. But you must act at once. Permit me to conclude with the old legend of the English friar, who framed unto himself a brazen head, endowed with all sorts of magical properties. In the course of time, this head was to speak ; and when the hour of its finding a voice came, it was to communicate every thing in the world. The appointed moment arrived — the image spoke, and said, ‘Time was—time is’—but, alas ! the friar was sleeping at that precise instant. ‘Time is past !’ said the voice ; and the head was shivered into a thousand pieces, leaving the luckless maker nothing but regret for having thus wasted the labours of a life. Now, decision is our brazen image—the time is, and is also rapidly passing away ; in a short while we shall be broken up and dispersed, even like the fragments of the brazen head.”

“ Still,” replied Monsieur, who had listened with evident impatience, “ if the King has resolved on his return, it is not my duty to oppose it. I must regret my inability at Blois : truly, quiet and retirement will be very acceptable, after all my fatigue and anxiety.”

“ *Mon bon Dieu !*” exclaimed Madame ; “ is this language for a prince of France ? But if it

come to this, had we not better go with a good grace to meet the King half-way?"

"And where the devil should I go!" ejaculated the Duke—and rising impetuously, went into an inner apartment.

The Duchess followed him, but returned a minute after—"His highness is at present disinclined for farther conference; but begs me to offer his thanks for your zeal in his cause." Saluting the company, she again withdrew; and for a moment there was a profound silence.

"It is vain, *mon ami*," said the President, De Bellicore; "however strong the arm, it cannot cut down a forest with a broken axe."

"Well," returned De Retz, "let the worst come to the worst; I am still Cardinal, and Archbishop of Paris—a temporary absence may be requisite, but that will be spent at Rome—I have made my reputation, and look to the future for its fruits."

"And I must retire into my shell," replied the President; "I have done with activity."

The council broke up; and Evelyn pursued his way to Bournonville's, fully resolved on leaving Paris. He found Francesca somewhat pale, but beautiful even as a painter's dream of beauty. Her picturesque costume, too, increased the effect,

for she had as yet had no time either to observe or follow the fashion of the French. She wore neither the rouge, the powder, nor the frizzed hair, so universal at this period ; but her rich dark tresses were bound with classical simplicity round a head small like that of a greyhound ; and she wore a black silk dress close up to the throat, with loose sleeves, like the garb of the novices of the convent where she had been partly educated.

Her manner was at first constrained, but it gradually became kind, as if she reproached herself for her involuntary coldness ; while Evelyn expressed his regret at his being obliged so soon to leave her, and enlarged upon the necessity of stating to Charles the turn in affairs.

“ My father blames the part I have taken in the Stuart cause ; and perhaps I had studied our interest more”—and here a gentle stress was laid on the words—“ had I disguised my feelings. But, methinks, every spark of generosity and spirit must arouse for the exiled and the unfortunate. I loathe the canting Roundheads, from their straight hair to their long sermons ; and pant for the hour when, instead of the low-bred hypocrite who now holds sway in England, the throne will be filled by our young, free, and gallant prince.”

“ You were not such an advocate of the Stuarts in Italy,” said Francesca.

“ Forsooth, my beauty,” replied her lover, laughing, “ I had not then seen how all the pretty faces in England are being spoilt by their straight caps and close coifs. I should renounce the Puritans, were it but for the sake of those glossy tresses. And now, sweetest, keep your chamber closely till I return. I love not that gay gallants of Paris should hawk round my dovecot.”

“ Your caution seems to me most needless,” replied the Italian, the haughty blood of her race rushing to her brow.

“ Nay, I meant not to offend; but who can have a miser’s treasure, and not guard it with a miser’s care? And now, farewell; I leave my fetters on you.” So saying, he flung over her neck a small Venetian chain of delicately wrought gold: “ So light, yet so firm, are the links which bind my heart!”

Francesca leant by the window after he was gone, and, almost unaware, watched his graceful figure recede from her sight; and it seemed like a relief when she could see him no more.

“ And this, then,” thought she, “ is inconstancy—that inconstancy of which the tales of my native land are so full. It no longer excites my

wonder, for I feel in myself how involuntary is change. I may control my words, tutor my looks, nay, curb my very thoughts; but my feelings are beyond my power. Can I force myself to rejoice, as I once rejoiced, in the least look of Evelyn? Can I bid my heart beat with delight at but the echo of his step? Can I persuade myself, that only to breathe the very air he breathes is happiness, when I know that his presence revolts and chills me? I may be faithful to the letter, but, ah! not to the spirit of my vow. False and ungrateful that I am, I do not love him now! Holy Madonna! must it be in myself that I first find that want of true affection which we are warned to expect in the world? or is it the heartlessness of this great city which thus affects me?"

She looked down, and marked where her large tears had fallen, like rain-drops, on her black dress.

"Alas!" exclaimed she, "I have cause to weep—I must weep over my own changefulness, and over the sweetest illusions of my youth. I feel suddenly grown old. Never more will the flowers seem so lovely, or the stars so bright. Never more shall I dwell on Erminia's deep and enduring love for the unhappy Tancred, and think that I too could so have loved. Ah! in what now

can I believe, when I may not trust even my own heart?"

Ay, love teaches many lessons to a woman ; but its last and worst must be when she learns to know that it is not eternal—that it can depart, and leave a scar never to be effaced, and a void never to be filled.

CHAPTER X.

"There seemed to me no achievement of which I was not capable, and of which I was not ambitious. In imagination I shook thrones and founded empires."—*Contarini Fleming*.

OUR inexperienced travellers could scarcely believe, the next day, that Paris was the same city which they had seen on their first arrival,—full of barricades, armed groups, defiance, and discontents.

A bright sunny morning ushered the public entrance of the King, triumphant as if La Fronde had never existed. White flags waved from the windows; flowers were flung down in profusion; not a voice was raised but in huzzas—not a hand but in applause. Preceded by the richly caparisoned guards, care had been taken to give them the appearance of an escort necessary to dignity—but not to security. Mounted on a snow-white horse, whose trappings of scarlet and gold swept the ground, and whose curvettings served but to shew the graceful management of the rider; his purple velvet cloak fastened with jewels, and

his whole garb glittering with worked silver, the young monarch might well win and fix the eye. Never was king more skilled in the science of his high place than Louis ; he was well aware of the power of the pomp that dazzles, and the state that awes—well did he know how to excite the enthusiasm which he only seemed to permit. He acknowledged the acclamations of the multitude, now by a wave of the hand scarce amounting to a sign, and now by a slight inclination of the head, which just bent the light plumes of his hat. But when he passed the statue of Henri Quatre he uncovered, and the sun shone full on his bright and falling curls, which fell like light on each side of his young but grave and noble countenance.

The people rent the air with their shouts,—it was as if he thus publicly pledged himself to follow the example of his popular predecessor. He passed on, followed by a brilliant train ; and, long before night, old grievances, parliaments, Mazarin, and all, were merged in eulogiums on the young sovereign. Events followed each other rapidly : De Retz—the popular, the beloved—was arrested, without so much as a crowd in the streets ; and thus ended the celebrated league his ambition had fomented, his spirit animated, and his genius maintained. Years of exile and privation fol-

lowed ere the return of the bold agitator was permitted. To those who have sympathised in the energy and daring of his earlier life, it seems marvellous to hear him mentioned in the gentle language of one of Madame de Sevigné's letters, where he is spoken of as a peculiarly mild and gentlemanlike old man, especially kind to the young, whose society he seemed to enjoy.

Mazarin immediately resumed his former power ; and Bournonville early one morning announced, not only the return of Madame de Mercœur to Paris, but also that he had communicated to her who were his guests. Almost before he had delivered his message, the Duchesse's carriage arrived, with a brief but affectionate note, entreating the immediate presence of her earliest friends. They soon reached the hotel, whose thronged court-yard told how many were the courtiers to the minister's nieces.

Francesca and Guido, accustomed to be their own heralds in the lonely Italian palace, were startled by the sudden contrast of the many domestics and the numberless visitors who choked up the passages and the ante-room. The chamber into which they were ushered was filled with people ; but both the Duchesse and Marie came forward and received them with every mark of kindness and

affection. But Francesca's eye was quick to remark that Mademoiselle Mancini's manner to Guido was wholly changed. Some emotion was perceptible — a hurried voice, a slight tremour, a heightened colour; but these signs were instantly checked, and her air indicated a degree of superiority, even patronage, very different to the simple and warm welcome of her sister. So many guests thronged the apartment, that exclusive attention to any was out of the question; and after a hasty presentation to the *Duc de Mercœur*, the strangers were inevitably left much to themselves.

Francesca gazed round, as we gaze in some half-waking dream, of whose illusion we seem aware, and yet partake. The glittering crowd, whose high-sounding names ever and anon reached her ear — the magnificent room — the splendour of the dresses — the diamonds shining amid the elaborately curled tresses she had been accustomed to see in their native darkness, their summer ornament the half-blown rose, and their winter-wreath the myrtle-branch — all oppressed her with the sense of change. She saw at once how wide a gulf had opened between herself and her early friends, and she felt that they never again could be what they had been to each other. There might be benefit on one side,

and obligation on the other; but their reciprocity of affection, their mutual exchange of small kindnesses—those strongest rivets of common attachment—were no more.

Guido's thoughts were very different to his cousin's: he partook not in her depression—his eye was caught by the scene before him, its novelty excited his imagination, and he was wrapt in the happiness of again seeing Marie. He was strong, too, in the conscious superiority of talent—that first hope of genius, as yet unchecked by circumstances, and unbroken by experience. He leant by the window, half alive to the gorgeous picture which moved around him, and half lost in delicious dreams of all the splendid impossibilities which he was to achieve.

Nothing at first frames such false estimates as an imaginative temperament. It finds the power of creation so easy, the path it fashions so actual, that no marvel for a time hope is its own security, and the fancied world appears the true copy of the real. How much of disappointment—what a bitter draining of the cup of mortification to the dregs—does it take, to sober down the ardour, and chain the winged thoughts of a mind so constituted! Let any, now perhaps staid with care, and grave with many sorrows, but who once

indulged in the romance born of enthusiasm and ignorance—let them recall the visions in which their youth delighted, while they smile at their folly, or sigh over their sweetness. Moreover, the lover and the friend ask very different foundations for their confidence. The one invests all things with the poetry with which himself is imbued ; the other, of necessity, examines into their truth. Again—love cares not for distinctions ; but friendship cannot exist without equality.

Francesca, too, was suffering under the embarrassment of singularity. Alive only to the happiness of again meeting her friends, she had not thought of her own appearance ; and she was painfully aware that her Italian costume was a complete contrast to the garb of the other ladies present. She caught many looks directed towards her, but all of curiosity—none of interest. She heard the groups laughing and talking around, but not one voice addressed to her. Good heavens! the isolation of a crowd—that bitter blending of solitude and shame, when you fancy every one that passes casts on you an invidious or scornful glance, and yet are perfectly aware that they do not care—scarcely know—whether you are a human being like themselves ! It is in vain to

say this is over-sensitiveness; weakness though it be, it is very universal.

Francesca would have rejoiced only to see a face she had ever seen before,—when, as if to shew the folly of wishes, one appeared. It was the Chevalier de Joinville, the cavalier who accompanied D'Argenteuil the night when forcible possession was taken of Bournonville's house. He remained for some minutes opposite the young Italian, with that fixed yet impertinent gaze which it is equally impossible to escape or to endure. Her evident annoyance, however, appeared to produce no other effect upon him than a desire to increase it by addressing her:

“I am happy to see,” said he, approaching her, “that the bloom of *la signora* is not affected by her late vigil.”

Now, if there be one thing in the world more provokingly insolent than another, it is a personal compliment from a stranger, whom you consider to have not even the right of speaking to you. Francesca was too new to society to possess the art of seeming neither to hear, see, nor understand, excepting what it is your own good pleasure so to do; she therefore replied by a slight bend and a deepened blush.

“Our English cavalier has left Paris on a

bootless errand ; for the news arrived this morning, that the daughter of the pious regicide is married to some young nobleman, whose name I have forgotten. Has Mr. Evelyn your permission for any length of absence ?”

Now, this was really too much : Francesca felt at once enraged and powerless. How is that impertinence to be checked, to which silence is no rebuke ; and which, yet, is your only method of marking your displeasure ?

But a thoroughly unselfish temper is singularly alive to the feelings of others. While Marie Mancini, engrossed by the amusement of the minute, had no attention to give beyond the gay converse of the group around her, Madame de Mercœur had never quite lost sight of the stranger. She had observed the whole of De Joinville’s manner. Perhaps, too, a little pride might blend with her kindness : she had been too much accustomed to homage to tolerate for a moment the young courtier’s supercilious manner to one whom she protected. Advancing to where Francesca stood, she took her arm, and said, in a tone of affectionate familiarity, “ *Cara amica mia*, — I love to speak to you in our native language, though, do you know, I have somewhat lost its practice, — how have you formed acquaintance

with one so dangerous as the Chevalier de Joinville,—are you aware that you have risked your peace of mind for ever?"

" Nay," replied Francesca; laughing; for, like a true woman, she saw her vantage-ground, and instantly took it; " it were hard that misfortune should be punished like a fault. Never was there a more involuntary acquaintance—it was made by force of arms. Monsieur was one of the party who entered M. Bournonville's house the night my brother and myself arrived."

" Ah! our little Corregio," answered the Duchesse, " told us somewhat of this; but, with his usual prudence, would not name the cavaliers. Now, Monsieur le Frondeur, what faith may we place in the devotion you have just been professing to my sister and to myself?"

Joinville bit his lip; but instantly recovering himself, replied, " Pardon me if the feeling born of your presence did not exist previous to such influence; and, as a pledge of forgiveness, introduce me to your friend, who seems rather to resent than appreciate the ready memory of admiration."

The chevalier's manner was now completely altered; and Francesca wondered within herself that he could be so amusing, as he exerted himself

to describe the various visitors who flitted to and fro. And yet, when he withdrew, she blamed herself for being amused — so completely had it been at the expense of others. But ill-nature is inevitable in those who “ season their discourse with personal talk.” De Joinville only aimed at being entertaining ; and what is there entertaining about people in general, but their faults, follies, and peculiarities, served up with the *sauce piquant* of epigrammatic epithet and of ludicrous inference?

At length the crowded apartment gradually cleared. Drawing Francesca’s arm within her own, the Duchesse gave orders that no more visitors were to be admitted ; and the little party adjourned to sup in an adjacent room.

CHAPTER XI.

“ It is a difficult thing to paint the pleasures of youth ; for, after all, the real enjoyment is in being young.”

THE Duchesse's boudoir was fitted up in a style of luxury utterly different from any thing before familiar to the Carraras. They had been accustomed to the extensive halls, the large pictures, the mosaic floors, the marble pillars, whose romantic magnificence belonged to other times. Here the splendour was more adapted to the actual enjoyments of the present day. The walls were hung with blue silk, edged with silver fringe ; and the closely-drawn blue velvet curtains swept the ground. On one side was a dressing-table covered with white satin, whose border of flowers, wrought in rich and natural colours, emulated those of April. On it stood a mirror in a frame of curiously cut crystal and silver ; and scattered round lay half-open boxes, whose glittering contents were equally

precious and fanciful ; and flung down carelessly, as if in thoughtless haste, was a diamond carcanet, whose rich gems reflected in every angle the blaze of the two large waxen tapers placed in branches extending from the mirror. Near were two curiously carved cabinets, one in ebony, the other in ivory, from each of which exhaled a delicious perfume. An immense Venetian glass occupied the farther end of the room, and, just opposite, hung a picture of the King. The couches and fauteuils were of crimson damask ; and drawn towards the fire was the supper-table. The domestics being dismissed, all gathered round, and Guido's place was beside Mademoiselle Mancini.

“ Do,” said she, smiling, “ let me give you some of these diminutive mushrooms ; with what a feeling of triumph I enjoy them ! When Mademoiselle was enacting the part of the modern Maid of Orleans, that town supplied the court with provisions ; and, a somewhat unheroic employ for the fair Thalestris, she commanded that our future breakfasts, dinners, suppers, &c. should be brought her ; among other articles she found some mushrooms, seizing upon which, she threw them aside—‘ They are too delicate,’ exclaimed the Montpensier ; ‘ I will not have the Cardinal eat them ! ’ ”

“A very feminine little bit of spite,” said the Duc de Mercœur.

“Now why do you say feminine?” exclaimed Francesca; “I think I could remember many small instances of masculine vengeance.”

“I observe,” rejoined Marie, “we are always blamed; but, after all, Mademoiselle’s revenge told. For my part, if I had a lover, I should give him all sorts of nice things to eat. I believe the pleasures of childhood, being translated, means the comfits and confections with which we were regaled. As for myself, I candidly own to being greedy.”

“Did not the King,” said Madame de Mercœur, “admire your pretty fingers while stripping the grapes the other day?”

“I think,” replied Marie, laughing, “that great science, the science of grace, which I consider one of the fine arts, may be displayed in eating a bunch of grapes. First, there is the stalk to be poised in one hand, then the small fingers are to be put in motion while picking the berries of the purple fruit one by one; then a pretty eagerness may be evinced, and a half smile shews at once your teeth and your dimples; and all this without that constant suspicion of display which attends your bending over a lute.”

“ We must send a fleet to Lisbon on purpose for grapes, my pretty sister,” said the Duke.

“ Have you heard,” continued Marie, “ the new version M. de Rochefoucault has given of his celebrated epigram on Madame de Longueville? Joinville was telling it to me to-day.”

“ And he told me,” added the Duchesse, “ that the lady, since the death of the Duc de Nemours, has taken to *la haute dévotion*. By the by, this is the second lover she has lost in a duel; her first, Coligni, was killed by the Duc de Guise.”

“ Her face,” said Guido, “ has all the mournful loveliness of one of Coreggio’s Magdalens.”

“ Hush, hush!” said Marie, “ we do not allow her beauty; I forewarn you against admitting that a single trace remains.”

“ You will see the court to great advantage to-morrow,” said the Duchesse, addressing Francesca. “ We are on the eve of a most delightful fête—we are going to put Amadis of Gaul into rehearsal; the King and the principal nobles will ride at the ring to-morrow. The King himself leads the first band, the Duc de Guise the second, the Duc de Candale——”

“ The Duc de Guise,” said Mercœur, “ is quite my beau ideal of a hero of the days of chivalry.

His adventures, whether of love or war, seem like the old Provençal ballads ; my only marvel is, where in these days he finds his romantic *matériel*."

" In himself," returned Marie ; " but I do wonder you can mention him with the Duc de Candale—there is *le vrai héros de roman*. I admire him, if it were only for his spirited rejection of my cousin Martinozzi's hand."

" She will have cause to thank him," said Mercœur gravely, " if it be true that it is now asked by the Prince de Conti."

" The Prince de Conti ?" exclaimed she, in reply, " impossible ! I laugh at the very idea."

" Time will shew," said the Duchesse, evidently wishing to change the conversation. " De Joinville tells me—"

" It is quite singular," interrupted her husband, " I seem never to hear a piece of news but it is prefaced with ' De Joinville tells me ! ' "

" Well," continued Madame de Mercœur, " his present intelligence is, that the colours of the Duc de Guise are blue and white, those of the Duc de Candale green and white ; but that those worn by his Majesty remain a profound secret."

" Ah !" exclaimed Marie, brightening up from

a somewhat sullen silence, “ you have not seen my new dress: it is perfect. It ought so to be, for I had his Grace’s advice upon the subject.”

At this moment a noise was heard, as if of coming guests.

“ How is this ?” said the Duchesse. “ I had given orders that no one should be admitted.”

“ But we,” replied the tallest of two cavaliers who entered muffled up in cloaks, “ would only take a denial from your own lips.”

“ Ah, your Grace,” exclaimed Madame de Mercœur, “ how easy it is to command when the command can only be obeyed with pleasure !”

“ Are you,” said the King—for the visitors were Louis himself, and his brother, the Comte d’Artois—and addressing himself more especially to Mademoiselle Mancini, “ preparing for the fatigues of to-morrow ?”

“ Not so,” she replied ; “ but we were closeted to talk over old times with old friends.”

Francesca smiled ; for it could not but occur to her how little these said old times had been mentioned, the whole conversation having turned exclusively on present topics. Again, she felt there was nothing in common between them ; and how painful it is to discover this, when our attachment seems to ourselves a thing of course ! This, how-

ever, was but a passing thought; for, naturally enough, her whole attention was fixed upon their illustrious visitor. Smilingly repeating his declaration that he was *incog.*,—a wandering cavalier, who merely sought to sun himself in their bright eyes, and then to depart,—still, while waving the observances of his rank, he yet permitted them to be paid. All knelt as they kissed his hand, and all remained standing while he seated himself in the fauteuil from which the Duchesse had just risen. Discovering, with the quick eye of those accustomed to watch every shade of manner, that Louis, transient as was the glance he flung round, had observed the Italians, Madame de Mercœur said, “We will not intrude upon your Grace our childish reminiscences, but—”

“Nay,” interrupted the King very graciously, for he had noted the singular beauty of Francesca, “I will not allow one of the party to be disturbed, not even little *Mignon*,” patting a small snow-white dog that belonged to Mademoiselle Mancini, whose eyes flashed as she thought that it was her favourite that was thus honoured by the royal notice. She knelt down to caress it, thus, as if by chance, kneeling beside Louis’s chair.

There was a slight family likeness between the brothers, but the resemblance extended no

farther. The Comte d'Artois had neither the dignified nor the manly air of his brother—he rather appeared like a pretty-looking girl, so effeminate was he and fair. He had more, too, of the lively bearing of youth, and indulged in a reckless and even noisy gaiety, the very reverse of the other's grave composure.

It was rather odd that those former reminiscences, to which allusion had been made, should in reality become the subject of discourse from the questions of a stranger; yet so it was. Partly from that courtesy which, when it interfered not with his enjoyment, was Louis's great characteristic, he immediately turned the conversation to what he supposed had been the preceding dialogue. There was some curiosity, too, in it; for those who depend much on others for their amusement are always curious, especially when conversation is a great staple of entertainment. People are apt to mistake this, and fancy the attention given to their details is a proof of the interest taken in themselves; it is merely that their auditors are attracted by novelty. Louis had the topics of the hour twisted into every possible shape to amuse him; but he had never thought about his favourites, the Mancinis, having even lived before he knew them: their existence, in his memory, was dated

from their arrival in France. Their early days were, therefore, quite delightful, because quite new.

“ Ruel,” exclaimed the youthful monarch, interrupting their description of how, in the myrtle and ilex woods, they used to recite Tasso and act his scenes, “ Ruel will be the very place for it; we must get up a ballet there, with characters from your favourite poet; I will be Rinaldo, De Guise shall be Tancred, you,” turning to Mademoiselle Mancini, “ Armida, and——”

“ We will keep Clorinda for the northern Amazon about to visit us,” interrupted his brother; “ she will understand the character.”

“ Nay,” replied Louis, with a half smile, “ but the ballet shall be one of the fêtes we meditate in her honour. Demi-savage as the Swede is, of course royalty must be royally entertained.”

“ Such a description,” said Marie, “ as I heard to-day! I understand that she wears a sword, and a buff waistcoat for a boddice—military hat, boots, and sash—gloves she despairs; and that her peruke would do honour to Marshal Turenne himself.”

“ I hear,” added Madame de Mercœur, “ that she is awfully clever, speaks eight languages, and would put the Academy and the Sorbonne united to shame.”

“ Ah !” exclaimed the Comte d’Artois, who had been sitting for some minutes apparently quite absorbed in meditation, “ I have imagined such an exquisite costume for Tancred ! No, no ; you shall not anticipate my intention.”

“ But we are forgetting, in our future plans, the fête of to-morrow. Mercœur,” said the King, “ summon the page who waits in the antechamber.”

The boy was called, and, dropping on his knee, presented a small coffer, which, as it opened, diffused a strong but delicious fragrance. It contained those delicate gloves for which Spain was then so famous.

“ Will you not wear these to-morrow ?” said the King, offering one pair to Madame de Mercœur ; then, turning to her sister, he added, “ I only hope yours are small enough for those *mignon* hands.”

Francesca observed that the gloves given to the Duchesse were embroidered in white and silver ; but those of Mademoiselle Mancini were worked with scarlet and gold, and fastened by a scarlet cord round the wrist. The party immediately broke up, as all were to rise early the following morning.

It was long before Francesca slept ; we are so

much the creatures of habit, that any great change has the effect of a moral chill. We dread the future, unless it comes upon us imperceptibly ;— whenever we anticipate, unless under some strong excitement of joy, we always fear. There are so many dangers, so many disappointments, and so many sorrows, ready to beset the human path, that we cannot but expect some at least to fall to our lot. The truth is, the young Italian was in a state of the utmost depression ; and those subtle emotions we call being in good or bad spirits are utterly beyond our control. The weight of one sad thought pressed upon every other ; she at once saw the hopelessness of Guido's attachment, and fancied she understood Marie's inconstancy by her own altered feelings. She, who knew him with the entire knowledge of perfect affection, knew well what the effect would be—wretchedness, the most complete, the most lasting, and the most irrevocable. Could it be the Mancinis—the impoverished and forgotten inhabitants of the desolate palace by the pine-wood—who were now the glittering idols of a court, favourites of Europe's most powerful monarch, and whose intercourse with them was one of the most unrestrained familiarity ?—witness his visit of that very evening. Again and again she marvelled what were Marie

Mancini's expectations—unbounded, she could well suppose. Generally speaking, we are incredulous of the good fortune of our friends, and, even though loving them, undervalue their qualities; the success of our greatest intimates takes us by surprise. But this was a singular instance; the change in her former companions' position had burst so suddenly upon Francesca, that she was more inclined to exaggerate than to diminish its extent. The very difference she felt between herself and them—she a stranger, friendless but for their kindness, in a foreign land—made the contrast more forcible; and she at last fell asleep, with the vision before her eyes of the Cardinal's triumphant niece—a crowned queen!

CHAPTER XII.

“ Incessant in the games your strength display ;
Contest, ye brave ! the honours of the day.”

Odyssey.

IT was a boast of Napoleon, that the very weather owned the influence of his auspicious star,—his triumphal entry, his procession, or his *fête*, were always marked by sunshine. The clouds were equally complimentary to Louis XIV.; no sky could be brighter than that of the morning which ushered in the festival ; and when Francesca took her place on a temporary gallery erected for the occasion, the *coup d'œil* more than realised the descriptions in the old romances. The ground appointed for the course was the open space between the Palais Royal and the dwelling of the English Queen ; a palisade marked the career ; and at one end, just below the gallery where Francesca sat, hung the ring, suspended from an arch ornamented with laurel, and in the centre

the royal arms of France. Beside stood seneschals, the appointed witnesses of the ensuing games. At the other extremity were the gardens, now in the full beauty of summer foliage; and from Francesca's seat being at the extremity, and the gallery being a little curved, she commanded a panoramic sweep of the whole scene.

Windows, balconies were alike crowded; but the most striking group was on the terrace in the centre. Seated in an arm-chair, covered with cloth of gold, was the Queen; her robe was of black velvet, edged with the richest sable; and the diadem at the back of her head confined the folds of a long black Cyprus veil. Her mourning now was but a ceremonious habit; nay, some said it was persevered in for the contrast, so becoming, of the dark garment with her still dazzlingly fair skin and bright hair—yet it caught the eye mournfully; those sombre robes were the only indications that life had one loss, one sorrow, or one change. Madame de Mercœur and her sister stood on either side; and, leaning on the back of the chair, was the Cardinal, looking both inattentive and weary, and taking no part in the conversation going on around him. Behind was a brilliant group of ladies and nobles.

Suddenly a flourish of trumpets arose upon the

air ; and, emerging from the middle avenue, came a gallant company, to borrow a phrase from those old romances whose picturesque descriptions the present actors were emulating. Two stately elms formed a natural arch, from beneath whose waving boughs swept the band belonging to the King.

Francesca marked at the first glance that their colours were white and scarlet ; and then she noted that Marie Mancini wore a dress of white damask, looped up and garnished with scarlet ribands. " The embroidery on the gloves," thought she, " was no chance selection."

The gay procession advanced. First came fourteen pages, wearing fanciful costumes of silver tissue and scarlet ; they bore the long lances, and the devices of the knights who followed them. Then came six trumpeters, blowing a brave challenge, each note swelling more proudly than its predecessor. Then came the squire, who marshalled the King's own pages, twelve in number, the last two of whom carried the royal lance, and the royal scutcheon, on which was emblazoned a rising sun, with the motto, —

" *Ne piu, ne pari.*"

No superior, nor yet an equal.

Next rode the camp marshal, unmasked, and in

his usual costume. Then followed the young monarch and his chevaliers, dressed after the Roman fashion—the cuirass of gold, the robes of frosted silver, the brodequins wrought with gold and silver mixed; and the casques were of silver, with white plumes tipped with scarlet. All were masked; but the King was easily distinguished by his snowy charger, whose mane was fantastically knitted with scarlet ribands. Together they rode round the circle, bending as they passed the Queen till the feathers swept the shining necks of their steeds. Again came the bold challenge of the trumpets, and the troop of the Duc de Guise appeared, marshalled in the same order, but garbed in blue and silver. Their leader's romantic temperature shewed itself in one peculiarity; his horse, black as night when the summer's tempest is on the sky, was led behind by two gigantic Moors, who by sign and word subdued the beautiful and fiery animal to the slow step of the procession. Trappings and housings there were none; and the slight silken bridle, which looked like a fragile thread, needed indeed a skilful hand if meant to control the noble creature. A page of singular, almost feminine beauty, whose delicate complexion suited well the delicate colours of his azure cap and plume, bore the

graceful flattery of the Duke's ingenious device. It represented a funeral pile, from whose embers a phœnix was rising, animated by the sun, whose light was its life. Beneath was inscribed in golden letters,—

“Qu'importa que matou, se resucitan?”

What matters his destroying, if he revives ?

All took the courtly insinuation, for the Guise had but lately been restored to royal favour. A third call of the trumpets announced the approach of the Duc de Candale from the avenue on the left. The livery of his company was forest green and gold ; but perhaps he himself most attracted Francesca's attention. He had not yet put on his plumed casque, which a page on foot at his side carried ; and he held his mask in his hand. It was one of those faces—so pale, yet so beautiful, with large melancholy blue eyes, and profusion of fair golden hair—with that ethereal seeming, whose associations are not of this earth—one of those that we unconsciously connect with early death. The presage here was prophecy ;—a little while, and that youthful and brilliant head found its pillow in the grave. After riding round the circle, the three companies drew up in a line before the narrow space which led to the point where the ring hung.

“ Ah !” exclaimed Madame de Brie, the old lady to whose care Francesca had been especially consigned by Madame de Mercœur, “ these troubles of La Fronde have sadly scattered the beauties which surrounded the throne. You should have seen the court ten years ago.”

“ To me,” replied Francesca, “ the scene appears as if it could not be surpassed ; but, then, I have seen nothing of the kind before.”

“ True, true, my dear ; experience is every thing—you are no judge till you begin to compare. You, if it had been only to form your taste, should have seen the beauties of the earlier period of the regency. There was the queen herself ; fifteen years have somewhat palled the red and white of a complexion which in its day was unparalleled. Then there was the Duchesse de Longueville, whose languid loveliness was that of the lily—the flower sacred to her house ; Madame de Montbazou, stately and dark-eyed like Juno, conjuring every heart by one look of her splendid face ; or Madame de Chatillion, the very queen of smiles, and with a fascination even beyond her beauty. They might at least recall Mademoiselle de Montpensier—proud, but so fair, like the young queen of Palmyra.”

Madame de Brie had quite forgotten that

fifteen years ago she had been equally eloquent in favour of fifteen years before. Well, memory is a very comfortable thing, usually adapting itself to the prejudices of the present.

Fortunately, the commencement of the games prevented Francesca from being quite overpowered by the envy of beauties that had been. It was a commencement worth the chivalric magnificence of Louis's after-reign—the scene in those gardens! The fine old trees in the distance, so rich in shadow, while the foreground was in broad sunshine—the long green alleys, along which rode an occasional horseman, breathing his courser—the terraces, crowded with the young, the gorgeously arrayed, and the beautiful—the youthful cavaliers, darting at full gallop down the narrow palisade—the burst from the trumpets, that noblest of music, as each competitor dashed at the ring,—altogether formed a pageant in which Amadis of Gaul might have taken a part before the eyes of the peerless Oriana.

As yet none had been successful, and now the three leaders were all that remained. Their precedence had been determined by lot, and the Duc de Candale was the first. He dashed forward—his long lance touched the ring—it trembled; but at that very moment his horse started—he passed,

and the quivering ring remained swinging to and fro. Francesca, whose position enabled her to discern the slightest movement, could not divest herself of a suspicion that the start of the horse had been provoked by the rider. The Duc de Guise came next; he made but one bound from the slender palfrey on which he rode at first, to the noble charger that stood beside, pawing the ground, as if disdainful of rest. On he darted with the speed of hope, and his lance bore the ring off triumphantly; but while turning to salute the fair spectators on his right, the prize, carelessly balanced, fell to the ground; and again Francesca thought that the failure was intentional. The young King now clapped spurs to his white steed, which had stood champing with impatience till his bit was covered with foam. A loud shout arose from the spectators—Louis had carried off the ring; and, balancing it gracefully on his lance, he rode round the circle; the second time he stopped before the Queen, and laid the prize at her feet. Two pages advanced; one took the spear, the other laid hand on the bridle, and Louis sprung to the ground; then, ascending to where Anne of Austria was seated, knelt before her. At the signal, Marie de Mancini took his casque, and his mother flung over his neck a silver chain, to which hung a star

of rubies, and, in the style of the old romaut, bade him name the Queen of the Festival. Louis rose, and, taking his casque from Marie, offered her the red rose, which was to mark sovereignty for the day. Her first glance was one of triumph—her next was one of mingled admiration and gratitude for Louis; and, accepting his offered hand, they led the way to the banquet prepared in the Palais Orion,—a favourite garden-house, where they often had collations when the party was but small, which was the case to-day. The Queen-mother did not dine with them; and only those nobles who were of the three bands, and twenty-four ladies. The banquet was gay but brief, as preparations had been made for dancing. Mademoiselle Mancini was led forth by Louis, who entertained all with the chivalric gallantry suited to his assumed character. The next dance she declined, under pretext of fatigue—she had no attention to give to another partner, and Louis's last words were to engage her hand again; and truly she required rest, for every effort had been exerted to amuse her royal listener.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Love is an offering of the whole heart, Madam —
A sacrifice of all that poor life hath ;
And he who gives his all, whate'er that be,
Gives greatly, and deserveth no one's scorn.”

BARRY CORNWALL.

THE tremulous pressure of Louis's hand yet vibrating through every pulse of her own—his last whispered words yet musical in her ear, Marie hastily turned into one of the more shaded walks, where the boughs, trained to meet overhead, and the trellis-work on either side thick with creeping and odiferous shrubs, shut out all view but its own green and winding path. Her cheek was flushed, her eyes danced in light, and a frequent smile passed like sudden sunshine over her face; vanity, in that moment of triumph, had all the strength of a passion,—its enthusiasm—its imagination; every thing seemed possible—the future rose palpable before her. Her eager and buoyant step became more stately, as if already in the presence of her court; already she granted favours,

and requited injuries—for assuredly forgiveness formed no part of her creed. She even put aside the boughs with somewhat of an air of condescension.

“ My first struggle,” thought she, “ must be against the influence of his mother. Gratitude! we owe none to Anne of Austria! We are just the puppets she destines for the amusement of her son—toys to guard against graver thoughts—the ornaments of the chariot, while she guides the reins. Fickle—unloving, is there one about her whom she would not sacrifice to her interests—ay, even to her whims? Holy Madonna! but I do respect my uncle’s genius when it has so controlled our false and wilful Queen;—I may chance to save him some future trouble.”

It is singular the charm that youth flings over both its exaggeration and its selfishness—perhaps they are pardoned for their very unconsciousness. Its expectations are unreasonable; but they are entertained in such good faith, that we first envy and then excuse the state of mind which admits them, and forgive their present folly, from our conviction of their coming disappointment. It is our own sense of superiority—the conscious superiority of knowledge, dear bought by experience, that makes us thus charitable. In youth, too, selfishness is divested of its most obnoxious part—

its calculation ; it seems thoughtlessness—again we pity, pardon, and fancy that amendment which never comes.

There is something amiable in even believing in our own good feelings, but it is an amiability whose loveliness is even less lasting than that of the complexion. Marie passed along—she had arrived at an especially pleasant part of her reverie—she was arranging her future household.

“ I will be lenient,” thought she, “ to Mesdames les Frondeurs ; they will be glad to get back on any terms, and their high birth will be an answer to the many who may urge claims on the plea of having known me now. My sisters had better marry foreign princes—it would be mortifying to see them forced to yield precedence to any. As for Henriette, that cannot be helped ;—an embassy will be the thing for Mercœur.”

How many more places might have been distributed by her incipient majesty it is impossible to say, for the thread of her meditation was broken by the sudden termination of the path. It ended in one of those beautiful little nooks, which, girdled in by shade, are yet full of sunshine ; the branches close the sides, but the clear sky is overhead. In the midst of a circular plot of grass was a small fountain ; a nymph knelt amid the waters, and a

little trickling stream fell from the urn by her side with a low and musical murmur. Even the small space of this fountain was a divided empire ; the farther side was clear and glittering with the golden daylight, but the nearer one lay dark in shadow, for a large sombre branch hung directly over it. The very gloom made it the better mirror ; and Marie started as she saw her face reflected side by side with that of the statue. For a moment she smiled at the contrast of her own head, with its ribands and its waving feathers, beside the simply-wreathed hair of the marble figure. But even as she looked, another thought arose in her mind. The nymph was so like one that had been a favourite in Guido's studio—a world of early fancies, of tender recollections, were called up by the resemblance. She thought of the deep and earnest love, which had seemed to her like folly amid more worldly scenes ; she thought of their wanderings by twilight, with the rosy sunset dying away amid the thick-leaved pines :—she turned, and saw Guido by her side. Admitted by the influence of Bournonville into the royal gardens, he had wandered round, and by chance followed the very path which Marie had taken.

“ My beloved Marie ! ” exclaimed her unsuspecting lover, “ this is happiness ! Ah ! if you

knew how chilled, how constrained, I have felt by the forms and the crowds by which we have been surrounded—how I have pined for a moment to tell you how dearly during absence I have cherished your image—how beautiful you seemed when I saw you again!—how beautiful you are, even in this strange and unfamiliar dress,” added he, following the direction of her eyes towards the fountain.

She allowed him to retain the hand which he had taken—it was but for an instant. The momentary softening of her heart was gone, and she felt as if she could reason him out of love, even as she had reasoned herself. She was strong in what would be the universal opinion; it would be an act of insanity to allow a girlish preference to interfere with her present brilliant hopes—it would be folly, nay, presumption, on his part, to talk more of love; still, she would act kindly by him—she would impress upon him the impossibility of constancy, and make the necessity of change obvious to his own conviction.

At first her words were hurried and confused; and the young Italian, though startled from his fond security, might still ask, had he, could he, have heard aright? But as Marie spoke, her voice grew firm, her anticipations gave strength to

her resolves, and she really avoided all difficulty by speaking the truth.

“ I do not,” continued she, “ talk about my uncle’s displeasure, or the obstacles which it would entail—I talk to you of myself. I own I am changed—I cannot help it ; nature never intended me for a heroine of a romance. I despise poverty—I dislike trouble—I enjoy the luxury which surrounds me—I delight in the homage—and I look to my future husband for more settled wealth and more assured rank. Of all that I most prize, you can offer me nothing ; and I confess love to be insufficient for my happiness. You and Francesca will ever be to me my dear and my early friends. You——”

“ Say no more, as a last grace !” interrupted Guido, passionately—“ I ask it at your hands. I see it—I feel it all,—your place, and my own folly. May the holy Madonna keep you from—from ever suspecting the pain of knowing that in one little moment life can lose every hope.”

He sprung so rapidly down the opposite path, that Marie almost asked, had she really seen him ? But she heard the quick steps passing along the gravel-walk ; she listened to their echo with anxiety, even tenderness ; all became silent, and her heart filled with sorrow for the anguish she

had inflicted. She felt the value of entire affection—the contrast forced itself, of love the deep and true, compared with the falsehood and the selfishness by which she was surrounded. A little while, and the warm and kindly feelings of long ago came back, and she sat down beside the fountain and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ I loved her ; for her sweet familiar face
Brought back my earlier self.”

THE great fatigue of the day being too much for the delicate state of Madame de Mercœur’s health, she soon retired ; and early in the evening she and Francesca found themselves, for the first time, *tête-à-tête*, and without fear of interruption.

The evening was chilly ; some fresh wood was heaped on the hearth ; they drew the fauteuils closer to the fire and to each other ; and felt as if old times and sentiments were come again. Past events and past feelings soon led to present recollections ; but, to Francesca’s surprise, the Duchesse did not seem to consider their position so perfect in felicity as it appeared to her guest.

“ What,” exclaimed her youthful friend, “ have

you to desire? You have rank, wealth, favour, health, and a husband who loves you, and whom you love, and of whom you may well be proud. I like the Duc de Mercœur so much; and I should have been sorry not to have liked him, Henriette: he is so handsome, so kind, and so silent."

Madame de Mercœur laughed at silence being mentioned as a merit.

" You may laugh," rejoined Francesca; " but you cannot imagine how bewildered I feel by the infinite variety of discourse which is here apparently a daily habit. I am talked out of my wits; I have scarcely recovered the surprise of the ingenious question, before I meet another surprise in the still more ingenious answer. I remember, in the dear old pallazzo, and the still dearer pine-woods around, that we have conversed away hours; but, then, think how interesting were the subjects —ourselves. We had the whole future before us; but here it is yesterday, whose sayings and doings are so repeated, as if every thing were done that afterwards it might be told."

" The truth is, *ma mignonne*," replied her companion, " we have nothing else to do—talking is the business of the idle. We do not talk out of the careless gaiety of the heart, which indulges its hopes, or expresses its feelings—we talk for

amusement; we are not interested in the doings of others, but we are entertained—always supposing, as the narrator may very well contrive, there is something a little absurd in them. We live together in society—strangers, rivals, and enemies, hiding the envy and hate, which it would be impolitic to exhibit. We care nothing for each other; society could not exist a day now, did the dislike or the indifference rise to the surface. Talking is an ingenious contrivance for hiding all this. An agreeable compliment conceals carelessness; a pointed phrase gives vent to many a suppressed emotion; and we can veil our perfect disregard to what people feel, by a most studied attention to what they say. I can assure you, talking is more than an amusement—it is a necessity.”

“ Well, I shall do my best to learn what seems to me a profound science; but at present, in my astonishment at many of the questions put to me, I quite forget that it is necessary for me to answer.”

“ My dearest Francesca, it is very indiscreet ever to be astonished; and an answer is a sort of conversational coin, which you should always have in readiness.”

“ Well, Henriette, what answer have you to

my question—what have you to desire more than you at present possess?"

" Security. Here we are strangers, dependents on that vainest of human reliances, court favour. I have seen my uncle forced into exile by an imperious and ambitious faction ;—true, I, perhaps, should not complain ; for it proved, if I had needed proof, the disinterestedness of Mercœur's attachment. He followed me into banishment, and married me when the very name of Mazarin was the signal for popular outcry and contumely."

" But, now that the Cardinal's power is more firmly fixed than ever, and yourself so happy in your husband and your home—"

" It is for others that I fear—for my sisters, indulging the most golden hopes, depending on so many chances, and which must make any destiny less brilliant than what they now anticipate, and of which they once so little dreamed, a disappointment hard to be borne."

" Yet what is not within your reasonable expectations ? I saw from the gallery the caresses which the Queen so publicly lavished upon you all ; and, then, the flattering distinction of the king appearing in Marie's colours!"

" Ah ! it is on Marie's account that I am most

anxious ; I know how vain is the delusion she is now cherishing."

" Yet if Louis did love her —"

" Louis," interrupted the Duchesse, " love her ! — it is not in him to love aught but himself. His mother is well aware that she may trust him, or Marie Mancini would have been, ere this, in a convent. The Queen encourages his intimacy with us—rejoices even at his preference ; for we amuse him, and are less dangerous than any that might carry him away from her immediate care. But she relies, and safely, upon the selfishness of Louis. Let Marie cause him trouble, annoyance, or interfere with the slightest of his interests, and her hope—her happiness—would be sacrificed as things of course. It would never even enter his mind that they could be consulted."

" But Marie—so shrewd, so penetrating ; is it possible that she does not perceive this ?"

" You have not lived long enough among us to know the intoxication of vanity. Marie has allowed herself to dwell on one brilliant object till her eyesight is dazzled."

" But cannot you advise — cannot you warn her ?"

" Alas, Francesca ! we are not now in the pine groves, where we once talked so freely. There

is here something in the very air we breathe which precludes confidence. We are sisters no longer ; we fancy—ah, how falsely!—that our interests are opposed, and that a favour extended to one is at the expense of the other. Moreover, you must remember, even as children, Marie was ever more resolute than myself ; and now, how little would she heed remonstrance of mine !”

“ Ah !” replied Francesca, after a moment’s silence, somewhat sad in both, “ the air of this great city does cause change ; a thousand illusions seem to have passed away even from me. I have, I know not why, a vague fear of the future—the future, from which I once hoped so much.”

“ It must be my care. For the present you remain with me,—you will excite less envy than if placed immediately about the queen, as was at first my wish, and I think you will be happier ; I feel that I am so myself. You know not, dear friend, how much of youth and of Italy you bring with you.”

How could Francesca answer, but by affectionate thanks ?

“ One thing more,” added the Duchesse : “ I have not forgotten Guido ; I have thought—” and here she hesitated—“ that all young men like change. The Cardinal will visit Bournonville

to-morrow, to see his Majesty's picture. Guido will there be presented to him, and receive his commands for Modena; he is to be the bearer of letters to our cousin. His absence will be temporary; so you need not weep at parting with your brother."

Francesca deeply felt the kindness which so unobtrusively removed Guido, for the present, from the frequent meeting with Mademoiselle Mancini. He was thus spared that, perhaps, worst pang of unrequited affection—that of perpetually coming in contact with its object—caressed, flattered, beloved, brilliant, while you are forgotten, though in sight.

" You know, Francesca," continued her friend, " that you must accustom yourselves to separation, for Paris is nearer England than Rome."

" I have seen Mr. Evelyn since my arrival," replied Francesca.

" That is a disappointment to me! I had arranged so many charming adventures, in which I was to enact the part of the good fairy—settling every thing for the happiness of my two lovers. Very provoking of Destiny to have taken the affair into her own hands, without my interference. But you look grave! A lover's quarrel, I hope; I shall be delighted to reconcile you."

“ Alas, Henriette ! how little are our feelings in our control ! I shame to tell you how much mine are altered. I endeavour to persuade myself that it is Evelyn who is changed ; but I am forced to confess that the fault is my own.”

“ Well, after this let no one pretend to be sure they know the heart of another ! Why, I would have risked my life on your constancy. You were always so earnest, so grave, so much to be relied upon ! I should have thought you would have needed another Petrarch to celebrate your romantic devotion. However, it leaves the field open to me ; I shall soon find you another lover in Paris.”

“ I feel that I am incapable of love—nothing can bring back the illusion of my earlier and happier belief. But, at least, I hold my faith to Mr. Evelyn as sacred as if he still were, what I once deemed he was, the only hope and object of my existence.”

“ We shall see,” said the Duchesse, laughing ; “ but I am now too tired to enact the part of president in the parliament of love,— we must leave this knotty point for discussion some other night. I own I have my doubts about constancy surviving love ; but though your infidelity makes me not quite certain about any thing, yet of one fact I

feel tolerably convinced, which is, that in all places, and under all circumstances, I shall love you very dearly, and be as anxious for your happiness as I am at this moment."

Francesca embraced her friend tenderly, and they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

“ It is a dreadful question, when we love,
To ask, is love returned ? ”

The Hunchback.

IT had been arranged that Francesca was to join Guido at Bournonville's, where he still resided, previous to the visit of the Cardinal and Madame de Mercoeur. On her arrival, she was surprised to hear that he had not yet arisen ; but on entering his room, she saw at once that he had not been in bed. The apartment looked into the garden, and a large old tree almost darkened the window with the heavy foliage of one huge bough ; the casement was open, and there Guido was leaning, his face bowed upon his arm, and so engrossed in his own thoughts, that he did not hear Francesca enter. Softly closing the door, she approached him with a light step, which, however, failed to rouse his attention.

“ Dearest Guido,” exclaimed she ; but his face

still remained hidden. With gentle force she passed her arm round his neck : “ My own brother, are you ill?—you frighten me!”

Half unconsciously, he raised his head ; and his cousin was startled to observe his extreme paleness, and the unnatural brightness of his eyes. She was herself shivering with the chill of the open lattice ; but his hand, as she took it, was burning. Making a strong effort to appear unconcerned, Guido muttered something about the over-fatigue of the previous day.

“ Now shame, dearest Guido ! what can be the cause of untruth to me ? when have we kept a thought from each other ? ”

Still he remained silent and confused ; when Francesca, placing herself beside him on the window-seat, said, in tones of the most tender affection, “ Guido, we are here alone, in a strange place,—orphans, with scarce a friend save each other ; where may we place confidence but in ourselves ? If we bar out love from our own hearts, where shall we ever find it again ? Speak to me—to your own Francesca. What sorrow can you have that will not be a sorrow to me also ? ”

Hesitatingly and reluctant at first, but warmed into passionate expression as he proceeded, Guido at length detailed his interview with Mademoiselle

Mancini, interrupted but by Francesca's soothing ejaculations of pity and of anger; for at first she felt too much to say half the rational things she had intended.

"But, dearest Guido," at length she ventured to whisper, "you seem to me to be scarcely aware of the great change which has taken place in the situation of our friends. Adopted children of him who is almost a king in this great country, to what honours may they not aspire?—while we—"

"Ah, Francesca!" he exclaimed, "do you think I do not see my folly—my weak, miserable, extravagant folly, in believing that the deep devotion of one loving heart could reckon for aught in this gay chaos? You think that only one dream has vanished—you know not how many sprang out of that one. Marie has ever been the aim of all my hope, the reward of all my ambition. I imagined myself capable of so much, and for her sake! I awaken from the delusion, and ask, Where is there any thing like truth in all the visions which have been to me the prophecies of future life? Deceived in one, shews me how deceived I am in all. Poor, friendless, solitary,—what have I to live for?"

"Friendless and solitary!" replied Francesca, reproachfully; "at this moment, my brother, I

could lay down my life to spare the pain you are suffering."

" My own sweetest sister!" exclaimed he, drawing her tenderly towards him.

" Marie was never worthy of you. Vain, she sought but for flattery, where you gave affection; selfish, she thought only of her own passing amusement, heedless of the pain which she inflicted on you. In her childish pleasures, herself was ever the first object; and now, ambitious and calculating, she grasps at more glittering toys, to gratify the same vanity in a higher form, and with interest instead of amusement for her object. She is incapable of caring for any one but herself."

" Francesca, you are too severe. She did love me once; but absence, and, as you must own yourself, the temptations by which she is surrounded—"

Francesca was about to contradict him—the next moment she checked the impulse; if it was any consolation, why not let him think that he was once beloved? " It seems to me, dear Guido, that youth has passed away from us both,"—this was the philosophy of eighteen—" for, young as we are, how different every thing appears to what it did! But a few months since, how we looked forward to our arrival in Paris! Now it would be

our greatest happiness to leave it. But, alas ! could we bear returning to our former home with such altered hearts?"

" Yet, why should you feel thus? — you have seen Evelyn, and he is unchanged."

" In words, but not in himself. Holy saints ! to think that I should feel his absence a relief, and look forward to his return with dread !"

" I must leave France," said Guido, abruptly ; his own feelings yet too fresh to admit of sympathy with those of his cousin's, which, in his heart, he thought somewhat fanciful ; " what do I want with the Cardinal's patronage? — the world is before me, and Mademoiselle Mancini shall not see one suing for her favour who once hoped for her love."

" Madame de Mercœur," replied Francesca, " was telling me last night, that, aware of her uncle needing some one in whom he could place confidence, as the bearer of letters to the Duchesse of Modena, she had mentioned you, and that his Eminence was pleased to decide upon employing you."

" And so," returned Guido, colouring with mortification, " it was soon decided that I was to be sent out of the way ?"

" If there was any intention in Madame de

Mercœur's plan, it was with the view of sparing, not hurting, your feelings," said Francesca, soothingly.

" Henriette,—Madame de Mercœur," continued he, correcting himself, " was always good and kind."

" And so she is still; the same Henriette who never came without some choice leaf or flower for my poor grandfather. I remain with her till your return, and it will then be time enough to decide on our future plans. But the Cardinal will soon be here; so I shall go, and lend an attentive ear to Mons. Bournonville's raptures about *le superbe jeune roi*, &c., while you attend to your toilette. Look here!" said she, passing her fingers through the tangled masses of his long dark hair, and parting it on his forehead:—she turned deadly pale—for there was blood upon her hands! . . .

" It is nothing," exclaimed Guido, with a faint smile.

Francesca kissed him in silence, and left the room; but it was some time before she had resolution to join Bournonville.

" Mon Dieu! Mademoiselle," exclaimed the fluttered artist; " his Eminence the Cardinal—and he may be here in five minutes! For the love of the saints, help me to place his portrait on the

easel,—there, there,—giving it a touch or two—“I am working at—”

“ But,” said Francesca, “ it is the picture of the King which he comes to see.”

“ Good, good ; I can reach that down when he comes. Madelon, burn some sandal-wood on the stairs ; and, Madelon, when I look at the picture of Tragedy, with the dagger and cup, go you, without my telling, into the cellar—here is the key—and bring up a bottle of Burgundy : if his Excellency is in a good humour, I may venture to offer it him ; and, Madelon, your best *confitures* for Madame de Mercœur. Ah, Mademoiselle, you are too good,” for Francesca had knelt down to assist in unfastening the cords of a package, which Correggio, in his haste, was rather tightening than loosening. A small but exquisite Madonna was produced,—“ Leave the cords about that ; his Eminence may observe it is only opened in honour of his arrival.”

As Guido entered, a carriage was heard slowly rolling into the court-yard. Bournonville flew down to receive his expected visitors, and, almost involuntarily, the cousins drew closer together. Guido grew paler—he only recollects that the Cardinal was the uncle of Marie ; while Francesca

trembled and coloured with anxiety, that he should make a favourable impression.

The door flew open, and Bournonville first appeared, walking backwards, swinging to and fro the cassolette containing the perfumed wood, and followed by the Cardinal, leaning on his niece's arm.

Madame de Mercœur advanced, and, extending both hands to Guido, addressed him with the utmost kindness. "I shall soon," said she, smiling, "be ashamed to confess what very old friends we are;" then, leading the strangers to the Cardinal, presented them to him, adding, "their name will be familiar to you, for the fresco in your oratory once belonged to the Carraras."

Each dropped on a knee before him, while Mazarin looked at them for a moment in silence, evidently struck by their great and peculiar beauty. "You might know them for Romans," he observed, "all the world over; but rise, my children, and the blessing of the saints be upon you!" His eye now rested, as the painter intended it should, on his own likeness: "Holy Madonna! but, Monsieur Bournonville, I owe you some gratitude; pray how many years have you taken off?"

Before Bournonville could give utterance to the flattering assurances that rose in their tens

of thousands in his mind, the Cardinal's attention was fixed on the Madonna,—seemingly carelessly, but, in reality, most skilfully displayed.

“ Raphael ! by all that is beautiful !” exclaimed Mazarin, examining the picture with much attention. “ How long has it been in your possession ?”

“ Just arrived,—a little speculation of mine, and only hastily opened, from a desire to have its merit appreciated by so admirable a judgment as that of your Excellency.”

“ What do you think of it ?” asked the Cardinal, turning to Guido, who gave a warm and, gradually, an enthusiastic opinion of its beauties.

The conversation now turned entirely on works of art, and the Cardinal evidently took much interest in the fervour with which Guido dwelt on the subject. The love of art, which was with Mazarin a passion, seems to have been the only sign in him of that poetry which is part of the Italian character ; but there is no mind, however worldly, without some ideal enjoyment ; and his was in his superb collection of paintings. He pointed out the “ glorious spoil which hung his storied walls” to a friend on his death-bed, and said, “ Is it not hard to leave all these behind ?” The enthusiasm and freshness of Guido, too, at-

tracted him. There is an inexpressible* charm to politic and care-worn age in the hopes which can never more be its own, and the illusions which can never again lend a grace to the beaten path of existence. It is memory that makes the old indulgent to the young. The Cardinal, moreover, deemed Guido's admiration and love the more reasonable, as they were lavished on his own favourite object.

Bournonville was able to look at Tragedy—her cup and dagger—with perfect complacency ; the Burgundy was tasted ; and, at length, Mazarin departed, leaving them all convinced that he was a very great man, who deservedly filled the high station of France's prime minister. Yet, notwithstanding his present condescension, Mazarin was not popular, neither had he popular manners—they were not what he affected ; and he was right. It is the man who is feared—not the man who is loved—that succeeds in the world. Refuse a favour, and all your gracious smiles, your kind words, aye, and even your really kind feelings, are utterly forgotten. But be necessary ; let men have aught to hope from you ; forward in any way their interests—and it matters not how you do it ; be harsh, abrupt, insolent, and it will only be “ your way.” People would, to be sure,

rather obtain their object by trampling upon you ; but, sooner than not obtain it, they will let you trample upon them. Civility is not only troublesome, but it is waste. To vary the old simile, people in general are like sweet herbs — they require crushing, not for their sakes, but for your own.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ How does the heart deceive itself, and feed upon a future which will never be ! ”

ALL arrangements for the morrow’s departure were soon completed. The day passed away in that hurry which makes it seem so short, and in the many little cares, so few of which ever answer their purpose, and which yet appear so indispensable to the feminine affection from which they generally emanate. Night came at last, and Bournonville, after much good advice, in which the gouvernante cordially joined—touching the necessity of early going to bed where there was a necessity for early rising—and after many good wishes, left the cousins to themselves. To those who had never before parted for even a day, there was something almost terrible in separation. Francesca had rejoiced in the thought of Guido’s absence; but it now rose before her, with all its possible perils and evils.

Absence, like every other pang, weakens by repetition ; the friend who has once returned in safety may return so again—we soon draw precedents from the past. She had to say farewell for the first time, and whatever we do not know, we always exaggerate. They sat together, with clasped hands, till the silence was suddenly broken by Guido, who had been intently watching a small bright flame, which, after having struggled for some time with the smoke around, sunk into darkness.

“ Francesca,” exclaimed he, “ that is my emblem ! Did you mark that little blaze, how it has striven, and how it has perished ? It had in it the germ of the glorious and the lovely, but it had no open space wherein to expand ; the heavy vapour oppressed it—other and brighter flames obscured its weakness—and now it is gone quite out. I see our resemblance. I, too, have in me a gift of power and of loveliness ; but it is power that will be subdued, and loveliness that will die undeveloped. I feel around me the iron weight of circumstance—I am oppressed by the heavy vapour of hopelessness—and lo ! I go, and my place will be no more seen.”

“ But that I have no heart for chiding to-night,” replied Francesca, “ dear Guido, I should blame this weakness, which creates the mis-

fortune it deplores. It is the adverse circumstance that gives the triumph. Were I a man, I should delight in difficulties—I should desire toil, exertion, and obstacles. Let the world be before me, and I would make my way in it. I cannot understand sinking under any shape that adversity could take ; I should enjoy the struggle, in my strong belief of the success."

" I cannot force myself into hoping," answered Guido, in the same low and melancholy tone. " Even in my happiest moments, while the grass was crowded with flowers beneath me—the sweet monotony of the running water in mine ear, only broken by the cheerful chant of the grasshopper—the boughs of the chestnut, filled with sunshine, dazzling my eyes, till the golden air seemed thronged with lovely shapes,—even then came pale and mournful shadows, whose white faces looked upon me pityingly. Even then, darkness, but a speck at first, would spread and spread till it overhung the atmosphere ; and I would lie doubting, and mournful, and encompassed by night."

" And what was this, my beloved brother, but a vain yielding to unbridled imagination, which, like a spring confined to one spot, collects its pure clear waters, and is at once a beauty and a blessing ; but which, allowed to spread abroad in

every direction, oozes through the marshy earth, becomes stagnant, and is habited by the loathsome reptile. That which would have been a green haunt, with its fair fountain, is a dreary and useless quagmire. Is it not thus with the mind, Guido?"

He made no reply; and Francesca was too anxious for his taking some rest previous to his journey, to pursue their discourse. The next morning she rose early; but as she bent over Guido's pillow to awaken him, she started to observe how oppressed was his breathing, and how feverish his slumber. "It is evidently the rest of complete exhaustion—sleep won by hours of weary restlessness." She had not the heart to rouse him, and seated herself watchfully beside, while the fear of his being ill when far away made her heart sink with affectionate apprehension. "Yet it is best he should go,"—and, for the first time, the sense of her own utter loneliness, when he should be gone, rose sadly before her.

"Great God!" exclaimed she, stepping softly to the window, which commanded the view of many streets, "to think, amid this multitude of human beings, we have neither kindred nor friends—not one to care for our welfare, not one to rejoice in our joy, not one to sorrow in our sorrow."

As she spoke, her heart reproached her with Henriette's kindness—still, it was kindness only ; how many hopes, fears, and cares, would she have, in which Madame de Mercoeur could have no share ! “ Guido has made me fanciful. I am unthankful for the good which has really fallen to our share. Henriette is very, very kind—how glad I ought to be of such powerful protection ! And my brother—this journey will do him good ; the sight of our own dear Italy will be inspiration to him—again he will feel the excitement of praise, and he will return eager and hopeful.” Yet, as she kissed his brow to waken him, she left her tears upon his cheek.

The bustle of a departure suspends every thing but itself ; and it was not till Guido rode out of the court-yard, that Francesca remembered, or fancied she remembered, a thousand things that yet remained to say. Fortunately for her, Bournonville was too much occupied to administer more than a word of consolation in passing ; and she remained in the window-seat, watching the gateway through which he rode, as if she every moment expected him to return.

Suddenly she started from her seat, the bell rung, and a horseman entered ; the dark-gray colour of the horse made her heart beat ; but in an

instant she saw that the rider was too tall to be Guido. He dismounted, and dropped the cloak which had hitherto concealed his face, and shewed the countenance of Evelyn.

Francesca sunk back. “ And do I feel no happier that he is returned ? ” But it was in vain to persuade herself that she was glad. Her hand was extended readily to him when he entered, but it was cold and trembling ; however, he seemed perfectly satisfied, and was eloquent in his praises of her improved beauty in the French costume.

“ I find here all loyalty and festivity. What a charming example for England to follow ! ”

“ The scene yesterday was splendid.”

“ Did you venture out in the crowd to see it ? ” asked the visitor.

“ I was not so bold ; but, thanks to the Duchesse de Mercoeur’s kindness, witnessed the whole from the gallery of the palace.”

“ You have, then, seen your old friends the Mancinis ? ”

“ I am residing with Madame de Mercoeur ; and only remained here last night, that I might see Guido set off. He is charged with a commission of the Cardinal’s in Modena ! ”

“ Residing with Madame de Mercoeur ! you could not be more agreeably placed,” replied

Evelyn; yet the expression of his face belied his words. Meeting Francesca's eyes, he added, "for your own sake—for mine, I must regret aught that places ceremony or distance between us."

She was saved the trouble of a reply, by the announcement of Madame de Mercœur's coach, sent to fetch her; and as Evelyn handed her in, he said, "I shall wait upon you this evening. Mazarin's fair nieces hold almost a court, and I will find some one to present me, for your sweet sake."

Francesca could only say something indistinctly about pleasure, &c.; and the ponderous machine rolled off at a rate little calculated to disturb any meditation in which she might please to indulge.

Evelyn's train of thought was far the most agreeable of the two. "If I had for a moment," thought he, "renounced my old belief in luck, I should resume its worship with all possible speed. Mark now what Fortune has done for me; well does she deserve my entire trust. Meeting the pretty Italian was enough in itself; and now she promises to be as serviceable as she is charming. Without money, our enterprise must fall to the ground. All hope of obtaining it from the Pope through De Retz is at end—that negotiation has been most judiciously kept out of sight. Well,

we must turn to Mazarin. I hear much of the influence his nieces possess ; let me try what it can do for us. I must not expect a great deal from Francesca : shy, proud, and cold, her very beautiful face will never be of half the use it ought to be. Why, in her place, I should dispute the heart of the young King with the Mancini. By the by, a little flattery will not be ill bestowed in that quarter, if she possess the power with Louis which is usually ascribed to her. Puppet though he be, in the hands of his mamma and her minister, his good pleasure would go for something. Ay, give us but a small present supply, and a hope of future assistance—which, if we succeeded, it would be policy to accord—and I wager my head, that the fire we should kindle in the west of England would soon spread over the whole island."

The great popularity of the Stuarts—certainly more allied to personal causes than we can at present calculate—is a curious fact. It was not one of those feelings drawn from hoar antiquity, when habit has become religion. No—their ascension to the throne was of recent occurrence. Neither were they grafted into the heart by that enthusiasm which, more than all others, dazzles and delights, viz. military renown. No victories, no conquests, excited the imagination, and con-

founded their's and the glory of England together. Their reigns had been most pacific, and their few warlike attempts unsuccessful ; and yet what devotion and attachment they inspired ! — fortune, liberty, and life, were yielded, and joyfully, in their cause. Wrongs were forgiven ; violated privileges and outraged laws forgotten ; and nothing but the still mightier spirit of fanaticism could have been opposed with any success to the spirit of loyalty. It was Charles's bigotry that cost him his crown. If he had given up the bishops, uncurled his hair, and spoken through his nose, he might have been an absolute monarch in all but name. As it was, he contrived to die a martyr, and to be mourned with a degree of personal affection which one, now-a-days, scarcely expects from the nearest and dearest friends.

Evelyn was but one of many. Reckless, loving pleasure and ease ; with much of worldly wealth and aggrandisement to tempt him on the other side of the question ; yet was he heart and soul devoted to the Stuarts — prepared to sacrifice his own enjoyment, risk his life ; in short, to be all but actually disinterested ; and, indeed, his only drawback to that, was his cordial hatred to the Roundheads.

It may easily be supposed, with these motives, that he was an early visitor that evening at Madame de Mercoeur's, where his reception was most gracious. For a brief while he forgot all his intended flatteries of the Mancinis, in his admiration of Francesca's beauty.

The appearance of your lover—known to be such—among your intimate friends, is embarrassing enough to any girl, who anticipates their remarks, and foresees their railleries. To Francesca, little accustomed to strangers, and, moreover, embarrassed and anxious in herself, it was enough to give the brilliant colour that reddened her cheek, and added to the light of her large black eyes—the more striking, from the white powdered hair; whereas, in general, they were shaded by the dark tresses now so differently adorned. She was, perhaps, more strictly beautiful, with her statue-like head in its own native darkness; but use is every thing, and fashion still more. Besides, Evelyn was accustomed to associate an idea of distinction with a certain mode of dress. Francesca's peculiar and high-bred air—so easy to feel, so difficult to define—flattered his prejudice for rank, at that time so broadly marked.

But their conversation was soon interrupted; for Mademoiselle Mancini, who had her own

motives for the attention, came across the room exclaiming, “ Since you do not remember me—”

“ Nay,” answered Evelyn, “ it is I who wait upon your memory.”

“ Ah, I thought you were going to make the usual remark, that really I am so improved since I left Italy—”

“ Pardon me,” interrupted Evelyn ; “ this usual remark is not mine. I own I can see no improvement—perhaps it was impossible.”

“ Seriously”—this was said with a very gracious smile—“ I am truly glad to see you ; it is something not to have lost your head in England. But, now, do tell us all your adventures ; and, remember, we expect you to be very amusing.”

This “ we ” might have been rendered “ I ;” for Marie soon contrived to engross the young cavalier’s attention. The truth was, that Louis’s attraction towards her had proceeded far enough for jealousy ; he had more than once questioned her with evident pique about the attentions she received from many of the aspirants either to her or to her uncle’s favour. She deemed it injudicious to encourage any ; and yet the time often hung heavily on her hands. Now, Evelyn was a perfectly

safe person, and yet both handsome and entertaining,—moreover, evidently well inclined to offer that incense in which she delighted. She might amuse herself with him, and yet have ready the unobjectionable answer of, “An old friend, known ages ago in Italy—when he was, as he is now, a very devoted slave of my pretty friend the Signora Carrara.” This reply effecting a double purpose; for Marie had not been too well pleased the other evening with Louis’s glance of admiration at this said pretty friend. It was as well to let him know that the ground was pre-occupied; and the King was quite young enough to be deterred by a rival.

The conversation on both sides proceeded with so much animation, that neither had a word for Francesca. She sat silent and lonely; left to ruminant at her leisure on the solitude of society. She heard around her gay converse, in which she had no share; and laughter, in which she was little tempted to join. She observed every face, and, still more minutely, every dress in the room; and, despite what philosophers say of its charm, found the task of observation very tiresome—she would have preferred a little participation. She could just hear the voices of Marie and Evelyn, without being able to distinguish what they said;

but could perceive that they were amused, which she was not. Now, one may be very well content to renounce a lover ; but it is very disagreeable to have him taken away.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ We must make
The heart a grave, and in it bury deep
Its young and beautiful feelings.”

BARRY CORNWALL.

“ I THINK our young Englishman so much improved,” said Madame de Mercoeur, the next morning; “ and as I take it for granted that you have found out, by this time, that your inconstancy was one of these mistakes which the heart will sometimes make, I have invited him to Compeigne. Now do allow that there is such a thing as friendship in the world.”

“ I never denied it,” said Francesca, who, however, wished that the friendship had shewn its activity in any other shape. She could not deceive herself; neither pique nor flattery could bring back her old feeling for Evelyn. Every hour some sentiment of his, carelessly expressed, jarred upon the inmost chords of her heart. All that she had from infancy revered as high and generous, was

to him matter of ridicule ; he did not even pay virtue the compliment of belief in its existence. Then, his insincerity perpetually revolted her. The present circle were always flattered—not so much by any set phrase of compliment, but by his desire to please ; while the absent, with him, realised the old proverb, "*ils avoient toujours tort.*" Their faults grew suddenly perceptible, and their absurdities an unfailing subject of mimicry. All these, in his hands, became singularly amusing. Francesca, who had little knowledge, and no envy, of the individuals so relentlessly caricatured, could not help being entertained. While their more intimate friends, whose competitors they were, who had a thousand small jealousies to be gratified, and divers little grudges almost unconsciously treasured up, placed no bounds to their encouragement. Still, it was a mirth that left, as sarcasm always does, its doubt and its depression. Human nature avenges itself by suspicion. First there comes the internal and unerring whisper, As others have been used, so shall we ; and, secondly, we are in our hearts a little ashamed of our own enjoyment, —we feel how contemptible it is, thus to revel in, and exult over, our neighbour's faults, follies, and misfortunes. Our very selfishness rebukes us. And if the many are thus actuated, what must it have

been with Francesca, whose life had passed in a small and affectionate circle, with all the fresh warm feelings of youth about it? where there might have been angry words to the face, but to the face only. While from their lovely climate, the poets native to their sweet south, the old ruins hallowed with the memories of other days, the lovely paintings, the still diviner statues, which had been their constant companions—the character had imperceptibly caught a tone of romance, calculated long to resist the inroads of worldliness and deceit.

On Marie Mancini the effect had been but slight. There was an innate little selfishness in her, which defied the finer influences. In Madame de Mercœur they were neutralised by a total deficiency of imagination. She was kind, good, and even penetrating, when enlightened by the affections; but head is required for the very highest qualities of the heart, and those were beyond Madame de Mercœur.

In Guido the imagination had taken one peculiar bent, and given one peculiar talent. In Francesca it was more generally diffused; it gave something of poetry—her feeling of beauty was more keen, her reverence for the good more exalted, and her perception of the generous more

strong, from native sympathy. Evelyn's faults were, therefore, of a kind eminently calculated to disgust one whose mind was so high-toned and so ideal. Still, there were times when she bitterly reproached herself, and thought, "I ought to have seen these faults before, or I ought to be blind to them now;" and by a sort of compromise with her conscience, resolved to make up in fidelity what she wanted in tenderness.

Previous, however, to their following the court to Compeigne, Monsieur de Mercœur having gone to join the army, the Duchesse resolved on passing a week at the Carmelite Convent.

The superstition which once taught us to believe that prayer and penance brought down their blessing on some beloved one, was at least a kindly one. The affections of earth grew at once more tender and more spiritual, thus elevated and purified by an intercourse with heaven. The court was dissipated, worldly, false,—even as human nature has ever been from the beginning, and will be even unto the end; but there, also, human nature asserted its better part, and had its deeper feelings and its higher hopes. Many a young and lovely woman, whose feet knew but the pleasant paths of prosperity, and whose ear was familiar but with the voice of the flatterer, would voluntarily

offer up a portion of her time, as her holiest sacrifice ; and on the straw pallet, and in the serge robe, take a profound lesson of the vanities which made up ordinary existence. To these vanities, it is true, they returned ; but surely not without a stronger humility, and some thoughts which, even in the world, were God's own.

Madame de Mercœur was at first unwilling that Francesca should share her seclusion ; but her young companion was too much in earnest to be refused. Francesca was still depressed by her recent parting with Guido, and clung to Henriette as her only friend,—she would have felt so utterly alone with Marie ; besides, she too wished to pray for the absent and the dear.

It was a gloomy evening when they arrived. A small, drizzling rain, chill and damp, seemed to relax the fibres of the body, even as it did their hair, which fell over the face heavy and uncomfortable. The wind howled with a sudden gust, as the gates of the convent swung on their sullen hinges, and sounded almost like a human voice in its agony or in its despair, as it swept through the vaulted corridors.

They were conducted first into the presence of the abbess — a harsh, severe-looking woman, stately and reserved — one who seemed never to

have known youth or emotion ;—a breathing machine, pursuing, day after day, a monotonous round of habits rather than duties, and impassive rather than content. They were then conducted to their separate cells, where they were left for the night.

Francesca felt oppressed as she gazed on the bare walls, the wooden pallet, the crucifix at the foot, where the wan light of the ill-supplied lamp gave a strange ghastliness to the dying agony of the Saviour. She turned to the casement, on which the moon was shining ; for the high wind had driven aside the clouds, whose huge dark masses threatened soon to eclipse the pale and dim circle of passing light. The window opened on a square court-yard, paved, and surrounded by the heavy building, whose high dead walls seemed to repel the gaze.

The imagination of the Italian, accustomed to the picturesque convents of her native land, shrank from the sterile austerity around. “Alas!” thought she, “can the Almighty Benefactor, who delighteth in the work of his hands — who has covered the fair earth with beauty as with a garment, — can he take pleasure in the penance which fills this sullen edifice? Why are we sent into life, but to share in life’s sympathies and

struggles? Methinks it is not well, thus to make a fenced boundary of that devotion which should mingle with and aid every action of existence."

Again the wind drove the dark vapours across the moon; a heavy rain began to pour down; and casting one more glance round the gloomy quadrangle, she felt it a relief to gaze on a medal of the Madonna, which hung round her neck. It recalled all the vivid hopes and beliefs of her childhood, when she was wont to kneel before some lovely image, till the face seemed to smile encouragement, and the little suppliant felt as if beneath a mother's eye. This period had long since passed; the discursive reading, the enlightened discourse of her grandfather, had cast her mind in a different mould to the usual superstition of her country; but faith and love were only more pure and perfect in a soul too innocent not to be religious.

At the morrow's early matins, Francesca's attention was particularly drawn towards one nun. Sister Louise was still in the early period of youth, but it was youth from which bloom had utterly departed. The features were thin, even to emaciation, and cheek and lip were alike colourless; while this deadly paleness rendered more remarkable the large lustrous black eyes, filled with all the light of excited fervour. But when the en-

thusiasm of devotion died away, as it were, with the dying notes of the anthem, the whole face wore the impress of fixed melancholy, to which there could be no hope but beyond the grave.

“ That is Mademoiselle d’Epernon,” replied Madame de Mercœur, in answer to her friend’s inquiry: “ I can scarcely recognise her. When I first arrived in Paris, she was among the most celebrated of our youthful beauties—one whose destiny promised to be brilliant as herself. The crown of Poland was offered for her acceptance; when she announced her intention of retiring from the world. Prayer and remonstrance were alike in vain; and she took the veil before she was nineteen.”

The attraction between Louise (for so she was always called) and Francesca was mutual, and they soon became constant companions during the few leisure moments that the constant succession of religious offices permitted. Worked up to a high pitch of devotional enthusiasm, Louise was energetic in the performance of penance, and fervid in psalm and prayer; but from all other duties she shrunk with disgust, and never voluntarily participated in the ordinary employments of her associates. A convent to her had evidently been the refuge of the bruised spirit and of the

broken heart. At first, Rome was the great theme of their discourse. Rome, the mighty mother of the Christian faith, whose amphitheatres had been red with the blood of the saints, and where the pilgrimage and the miracle still testified to the truth. But it was not likely that conversation between two very young persons should always keep to this exalted strain ; the feelings are sure to follow close upon imaginings, and confidence is natural to youth.

Francesca had been so long accustomed to have every thought spring from the heart to the lip, that the restraint so familiar to those with whom she had of late associated, oppressed and chilled her. Reserve and distrust seemed equally painful and unnatural ; it was too soon for the pride of art, which supports so many through winding and rugged pathways.

Louise, bred up amid strict forms and courtly observances, perhaps found the far greater relief. To talk of herself and of her feelings, with the entire conviction of affectionate attention in the listener, was a new sensation. Besides, there was now such a wide and such an irretrievable gulf opened between her present and the past, that she referred to the days of her youth with a delight like that of age, which recalls mournfully and

tenderly joys and sorrows which never more can disturb a pilgrimage, which is even now passing through the valley of the shadows of death. The monastic seclusion of Sister Louise was like old age, inasmuch as all events and emotions in life were left far behind ; all emotions, did we say ? —not so. There are some that will rise even at the foot of the altar, and will haunt the pillow, however guarded by penance and by prayer. These remembrances would have been less vivid had Mademoiselle d'Epernon remained in the world : love would have become its own atheist, as it found of what changeable and finite material that passion was formed, which once seemed so eternal ; and the single disappointment on which she now dwelt would have grown supportable from companionship. Mademoiselle d'Epernon, in the gay and varied pathway of busier life, would have almost lost the image, now so constant and so precious.

At the back of the convent was a large though neglected garden. Fruit and yew-trees mingled together ; and in some of the more sunny patches, one or two of the nuns had cultivated some carnations, whose green buds were just beginning to take the small globular form, which, as yet, had no beauty but that of promise.

"I observe," said Francesca to her companion, "that you have no flowers."

"I have not patience to cultivate them," replied Louise: "I planted some once; but, poor things, they soon perished for want of care. I used to love them; but now my thoughts wander away from the flowers to their recollections—to all that should be so utterly banished from my meditations."

Perhaps there is not a situation in the world so confidential as pacing up and down some shady walk, arm in arm. The freedom of that freest element, the air, communicates itself to the thoughts; the green obscurity of the closing branches overhead re-assures timidity; the motion gives its own activity, and dissipates the nervous restlessness ever attendant on excitement. Your face is necessarily a little averted from your companion's, though not enough to prevent your marking the attention given. Then the chance which led to your choice of subject was so accidental, the discourse has proceeded so gradually, that restraint has melted away from the lip, and reserve from the heart, almost before the speaker is aware that the secret soul has found its way in words.

"I can scarcely," said the nun, as she complied with Francesca's request that she would

trace the progress of the change—seemingly so strange and sudden — which sent the youthful beauty from the court to the cloister, “ recall one sorrow or one disappointment in my earlier life. I had good health, a gay temper, and was surrounded by indulgence and affection,—from my father, of whom I was the darling plaything, to my nurse, whose principal object in existence was myself.

“ The court was at its very gayest, when, on our return from England, my age allowed me to participate in the festivities which were the order of the day. The sombre austerity of the late King had disappeared with himself—the dissensions, whose echoes have pierced even these walls, had not then commenced. There was some truth in the flattery which said, that the Queen ruled all France with a smile. But the pleasantest time of our life leaves the lightest impression ; or, perhaps, one deep feeling has absorbed all memory, as it has destroyed all hope. I am astonished to think how little I remember of all the light fancies and vanities which made the delight of my first two years at court.

“ Perhaps you have heard that there was once some purpose of marriage between the Duc de Joyeuse and myself; it is of that which I have to tell. Even in your brief experience of society, you must have discovered that its success has its

chances. There are some evenings when you succeed, you scarcely know why, and the homage of one seems only to attract that of another. It was on such an evening that I first met the Duc de Joyeuse. I danced with him, and he scarcely spoke to me;—perhaps the contrast had its effect, for that night my silent cavalier was the only one who obtained a second thought. I felt a vague desire to see him again; I wondered whether he was always so reserved; I endeavoured to recall the few words which he had said; and rose the next morning eager and impatient, expecting I knew not what. How long the morning seemed! I scarcely heard a word that was said to me; I could keep my attention to nothing. I went to a ball in the evening. My eyes fixed involuntarily on the door; every one seemed to enter excepting the one whom I could not help anticipating in every new arrival. I danced without spirit; I found the evening wearisome; I complained of fatigue; and I retired to rest with a discontent and a despondency entirely new to my experience.

“ Mademoiselle de Montpensier was at that time my most intimate friend; and the next morning she entered my chamber before I was risen, a slight headache serving as an excuse. ‘ As usual,’ said she, laughing, ‘ I am come to tell you

of your conquests. I was at Madame de Guise's yesterday evening, and her youngest son could talk of nothing but Mademoiselle d'Epernon.' 'Why, he scarcely spoke to me!' 'Speaking of you,' replied my companion, 'is far more expressive: but you are actually blushing about it, — I do verily believe it is a mutual impression.'

" My mother entered my room at that moment; but Mademoiselle went on rallying, and it seemed to me that the subject was not disagreeable even to her. Alas, how that thought encouraged my own weakness! The truth was, that an alliance between the houses of Guise and Epernon was at that time deemed equally suitable by both. How little can the very young comprehend the affections being made matter of policy! I discovered that my headache was gone with a surprising degree of rapidity; I arose with such gay spirits, I found the liveliest pleasure in all my usual occupations. True, I did not continue long at any of them, and every now and then lost myself in such a delicious reverie of the coming evening.

" It was not quite so delightful as I expected; for shame and confusion for the first hour of the Duc de Joyeuse's presence made me scarce conscious of what I said or how I looked; and during the last I could think of nothing but how silly I

must appear to him. Still, with what a happy flutter of the heart I flung myself into my fauteuil that night, to think over the events of the evening!

“ Time passed on, and François became my avowed lover. About two months after our first meeting, I was taken ill, and of the small-pox. The holy saints forgive me for the horror with which I heard my disease pronounced! I prayed in my inmost soul that I might die rather than become unlovely in his sight: I have been justly punished. With what a strange mixture of joy and dread did I hear his voice, almost hourly, in the antechamber, making the most anxious inquiries! Others shunned the poisoned atmosphere, but François feared it not. What prayers I implored them to make in my name that he would refrain from such visits!

“ One day he came not: I was told, and truly, that business the most imperative required his personal attendance; yet I could not force the ghastly terror of his illness from my mind. I dared not tempt my fate by content—the agony which I suffered seemed a sort of expiation. The next day I heard his voice, and fainted. Francesca, it is an awful thing thus to allow your destiny to be bound up in that of another—to live

but by the beatings of another's heart,—thus, as it were, to double your portion in every risk and weakness of humanity.

“ I cannot describe to you the mixture of anxiety and shame with which I desired to know how I looked. One morning, while alone with my mother, I asked her to bring me a little mirror that was wont to lie on the table ; she smiled, and said, ‘ Not yet, Louise.’ I never felt one moment’s care after that—I knew that she could not have smiled, had she anticipated any very terrible alteration. At length I was able to rise—to move from one chamber to another, and at last to see François. Do you wonder I cannot bear flowers, when I tell you that he used to bring them to me every day ? I was too happy : earth, in its perfect enjoyment, had no thought for heaven. Life is but a trial ; and wherefore was I to receive my reward before the time ? But, ah ! my friend, a woman may well be forgiven for the passionate sorrow with which she sees the empire of the heart pass away from her. Is it a light thing to discover that you are poor, where you deemed that the most precious riches were garnered ?—to find what had seemed to you like fate, treated as a trifle and a toy ?—to think that affection, which gathered pride from its imperishable nature, is yet

dependent on such slight circumstances?—The discovery, too, how much you have overrated your own power? humiliation and regret exchange but to heighten their bitterness.

“ Soon after my recovery, Mademoiselle de Guise appeared to seek my friendship more than she had before done. How willingly I met her advances!—I loved François too well not to love those connected with him. Yet her friendship disturbed our intercourse; she was constantly interrupting our conversations, and I found myself perpetually engaged in a whispering dialogue, from which François was completely excluded. She possessed a peculiar talent for placing every body in their worst possible light; I felt that I never appeared to advantage in her presence. She drew from you some playful opinion, and then, suddenly repeating your words seriously, would, by some imperceptible change, contrive to make your expression appear the unconscious betrayal of some strangely unamiable feeling. Mademoiselle de Montpensier warned me against her treachery. ‘ She hates you,’ said my friend; ‘ you give into her snares, and will be surprised when you find they have succeeded.’ I little heeded this warning—it is so difficult for the young to believe themselves hated without a cause!

“ A few weeks after my illness we went to Sedan. A thousand slight anxieties and difficulties, contrived by Mademoiselle de Guise, had kept me in a perpetual fever ; my health was sinking under them—and change of air and scene always seem such infallible remedies where the pale cheek is considered, and not the harassed spirits. Indeed, the persecution under which I suffered was one not easily to be told in words ; I had not then thought over it as I have done since. The journey, therefore, was principally undertaken on my account ; but, once at Sedan, and some affairs of my father’s detained us beyond the time that had been expected.

“ Long as our absence appeared, it ended in our return to Paris. One—two—three days elapsed, and François never came ; yet he knew of our arrival, and was only separated from us by a street. The fourth day brought Mademoiselle de Montpensier. She laughed, and, recalling her former warning, asked me, ‘ Who was right ? ’ and informed me that the Duc de Joyeuse was now the devoted attendant of Mademoiselle Guerchy ; and she ended in being quite angry with me for not seeming so utterly overwhelmed as she expected. There were two causes for this ; first, and that indeed was chief, in my secret soul I

disbelieved what she asserted ; and, secondly, I felt so angry with her want of sympathy.

“ But her assertion soon proved its truth. That very evening I met both the Duc de Joyeuse and Mademoiselle Guerchy ;—a slight embarrassment on his part, a little air of triumphant impertinence on hers, and an affected but insolent commiseration from Mademoiselle de Guise, told the whole. Francesca, I have heard my father say, that the shock of a gun-wound at first deadens the pain, and the suffering is lost in the shock. Mine was such a case ; it was confusion, not pride, which supported me through the evening. When we were in the carriage, my mother put her arm round me, and said, ‘ I am charmed with your conduct, my child ; you treated *cet jeune insolent* with fitting disdain.’ A sudden resolution grew up in my heart, and I thought within myself, ‘ My mother shall not be made wretched by my misery ;’ and, with a strong effort, I restrained the impulse which prompted me to throw myself on her neck and weep.

“ It is singular how little I recollect of the succeeding period. My existence was a blank—I neither thought nor felt ; a strange impatience actuated all my actions. I longed for change—for movement ; I dreaded being left a moment. I

craved for pleasures which, nevertheless, I did not enjoy. I grew bitter in my words—I believed the worst of every one ; nay, I sometimes doubted the affection of my kind, my indulgent parents. But let me hastily pass over this vain and profitless epoch,—the fierce tempest, and the weary calm, were but the appointed means by which I reached the harbour of faith and rest.

“ During our stay at Bourdeaux, I accompanied my mother to a little convent, whither had retired an early friend, one who had seen much trouble, and known many sorrows. I was aware of her history, and was singularly struck with her calm and gentle manner. I left the cell ; and my chance wandering through the garden led me to the burial-ground. I sat down on one of the graves, at first from very idleness ; but the still solemnity of the place gradually impressed my thoughts—the presence of the dead made itself felt. I looked over the numerous tombstones, so various in their dates :—the maiden reposed by the full of years ;—all bore the same inscription—‘ *Requiescat in pace.*’ I had before seen the words—I had never before reflected on them. What was this peace ?—I felt that it was the peace of hope, as well as of rest. It was not only that the turmoil of this feverish life was at an end, but that

such end was only the beginning. I saw the sunshine falling over the tombs—to me it seemed like the blessing of Heaven made visible. It so happened that the place where I sat was the only one in shadow: to my excited feelings, the darkness was emblematic. I stepped forth into the glorious sunshine, and prayed that even as that light illumined my mortal frame, so might the Divine grace illumine my soul! From that instant I vowed myself unto God. I know, Francesca, that you consider this but as the ill-regulated enthusiasm of a moment—and such I now confess that it was.

“ But out of evil worketh good. That enthusiasm led to reflection—that reflection to conviction. I became deeply penetrated with the vanity and the worthlessness of my former life. I looked at its petty cares—its bitter sorrows, and said, ‘ Oh, that I had the wings of the dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest;’ and then I learned that faith had wings even like the dove’s, and that its rest was in heaven. One trial yet remained; but I trusted, in all humility, that the difficulty would make the sacrifice more acceptable. Yet, from day to day, I delayed telling my mother, that in me she saw the dedicated servant of God. Every time I sought her presence I

resolved on the disclosure, but in vain ; the words died on my lips, and again I had to pray for strength from above.

“ One morning I was summoned at an earlier hour than usual to her chamber. She received me with an expression of rejoicing affection, which shewed me she had something more than usually pleasant to unfold. I had scarcely taken my accustomed low seat at her side, when, opening a casket which stood on the table near her, she took out a diamond tiara, and, placing it in my hair, pointed to the glass. ‘ Ah, my child ! ’ she exclaimed, ‘ you well become your future crown ! ’ and, without waiting for my reply, she informed me that my father’s negotiations for my marriage had been completely successful, and that the King of Poland had demanded my hand.

“ The time for concealment was over. Supported by a strength not my own, I threw myself at her feet, and avowed my unalterable resolve. That dear mother has since died in my arms, blessing her child, and rejoicing that I had chosen the better path ; and yet, even now, I shrink from recalling the suffering of that scene. The cloister then seemed to my beloved parent even as the grave ; and, ah ! my father’s anger was terrible to bear, for it was an anger that grew out of love.

“ But if their reproaches cut me to the heart, how much more did I suffer from their entreaties ? Yet I persevered even to the end, and was permitted to begin my year of novitiate in the hope that my resolution would falter when put to the trial. They knew not in what entire sincerity it had been taken. I remember a letter of remonstrance I received from Mademoiselle de Montpensier, and, among other arguments, was this : ‘ I implore you to marry the King of Poland, if it were only to mortify Mademoiselle de Guise.’ She was little aware that forgiveness of even her enmity had been the earliest offering of my heart above.

“ I have never repented my choice ; every hour I have felt my belief more perfect, and my hope more exalted. Had I remained in the world, experience could but have brought me added discontent, and more utter weariness. I had been too profoundly disabused of life’s dearest illusions ever again to allow of their sweet engrossment. Only those who have looked hopelessly upon life, and turned again to the restless and gloomy depths of their own heart with a despair which is as the shadow of the valley of death,—only they can know the peace that is of heaven, and the faith that looks beyond the portals of the grave.

“ Once only since my abode in this convent

has my heart gone back to the things of its former life ; but tenderly—not repiningly. Mademoiselle de Montpensier passed here a week in Lent, and her first intelligence was, that the Duc de Joyeuse had died of the wounds he had received while leading on a charge of cavalry during a sortie from Paris. He died, too, unmarried. Heaven forgive the weakness which found in that thought sweetest consolation ! I was free to remember him—to pray for him—to know that to none other could his memory be precious as it was to me. Perhaps even now, looking down from another world, better and happier than the one where we go on our way in heaviness, he knows with what truth and constancy I loved him. I now dare hope to meet him again ; for, Francesca, what may we not hope from the goodness of God ?”

The nun’s voice sank into silence, and her companion saw that her pale cheek was warm with emotion, and her large lustrous eyes bright with tears. A kind pressure of the hand expressed her sympathy, and they parted,—Louise to join a service about to be performed, requiring the attendance of the sisters only, and Francesca to her solitary cell, to muse over the votary’s confession. But she looked back to the world ; her yet unbroken spirit asked activity, not repose

—a thousand hopes and wishes rose in vivid colours upon her imagination. She knew as little what she asked as what she anticipated ; still the future was before her, and all know what the future is to youth. Nothing more truly proves that life is but a trial—than the pleasures which depart, the sense of enjoyment which deadens, and the disappointments which spring up at every step in our pilgrimage. Could life preserve its illusions, who would be fit to die ? Vanity of vanities is written on this side of the grave, but that we may more clearly discern that on the other shines the hope of immortality.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ A new world rises, and new manners reign.”

YOUNG.

THE first week after their arrival at Compeigne, the Duchesse was confined to her room by slight indisposition ; and Francesca never left her. It was a constant gratification to perceive, that, but for herself, the Duchesse's sick-room would have been dull and solitary ; for Marie was so much occupied with the gaiety of the court, that she had little leisure for the amusement of an invalid.

One morning, the first that Madame de Mercœur had been equal to the task of receiving visitors, the Chevalier de Joinville and Mr. Evelyn arrived together.

“ Ah, Madame !” exclaimed the former, “ what a pity you were not present to witness Mademoiselle Mancini's triumph last night ! — the mere necessity for yielding in such a case was victory.”

“ Let me hear what the triumph was,” said their hostess.

“ You are aware that the entertainment last night was given in honour of the Queen of England. Few were admitted, as it was quite the household circle, and all ceremony was to be waved. So thought our young King ; for when he led his partner to the dance, that partner was not the Princess Henriette, but Mademoiselle Mancini. The Queen rose, snatched away the King’s hand, and led him to the pretty little fairy, whose eyes were already filled with tears—the fear of not dancing being before them. Louis turned away, saying, ‘ He would rather not dance at all than dance with a child.’ His mother insisted—the English Queen interfered—Mademoiselle Marie was the very image of triumphant submission—and we all stood round, looking as innocent and indifferent as possible. The King gave way at last, and danced with *la petite* ; but looks and words were alike addressed to your sister. Ay, and our white-handed Queen sees she must conciliate ; for, at the close of the evening, she expressed her regret that she had been so hasty, and caressed Mademoiselle Mancini, as if there was something to be made up with her.”

“ Once for all,” interrupted Madame de Mer-cœur, “ I wish you would not talk such nonsense ; their Majesties are too good ; and it was as much my sister’s duty to obey the King by standing up to dance, as it was to resign her place, when she understood that such was the Queen’s wish.”

The Chevalier saw at once that the subject was unpleasing, and immediately changed it.

“ You know, I suppose, that our northern Penthesilea arrives to-morrow ; she has amazed the good people of Paris, and we are all preparing to be astonished.”

“ I hope,” said Evelyn, “ that we shall not exhaust our astonishment *en avant*—that very common process of anticipation.”

“ According to my belief,” replied the Chevalier, “ there is nothing worth anticipating.”

“ Nothing worth realising, you mean !” exclaimed Francesca.

“ Nay,” returned the Chevalier ; “ I do not come from so poetical a country as your fair Italy — to me reality is every thing. Let my pleasure come, and I will enjoy it ; but I really cannot afford to waste my time beforehand in a thousand visionary anxieties. No ; I hold hope to be a great mistake—life is too short for it.”

"It is too true that nothing realises your previous idea—and then how bitter is your disappointment!" replied Francesca.

"You seem to have acquired much experience in a brief space; it is somewhat soon to be convinced of the worthlessness of pleasure," answered De Joinville, with an almost imperceptible sneer. Slight as the expression was, it had its effect on the young Italian, who instantly resumed her usual silence.

We talk of youth as our happiest season, because, perhaps, we do not begin to moralise upon it till it has been long past. The present sorrow always exceeds its predecessors—not so the present joy; comparison exaggerates the one, while it diminishes the other; and people talk of their youth as if it had not been a period of feverish sensitiveness, awkward embarrassments, many heart-burnings, and an utter want of that self-reliance which alone can ensure content. It is folly to dwell on any season's peculiar happiness; each might in turn be weighed in the balance, and found wanting.

The week following Madame de Mercoeur's recovery was one of great gaiety. Fête succeeded fête in honour of the arrival of Christina of Sweden, who seemed to communicate her own

reckless love of novelty to the then somewhat staid French court. Claim your privileges as an oddity, and even you yourself will be astonished at their extent. In an atmosphere of ceremony, Christina was free as air; surrounded by forms, she observed none of them; and, equally lax in her moral and religious notions, she yet succeeded with a queen now prude and devotee—and both, it may be, the more strongly pronounced, from their being late assumptions. Anne of Austria was amused, so was Louis; and *l'Amazone philosophe* had a prodigious run.

There never was mask so gay but some tears were shed behind it; and Francesca, one perhaps among many, found it possible to be very sad, even at a festival. Despite of Madame de Mérœur's kindness, her situation was often painful, and always disagreeable. She could not but contrast her lot with that of others; of course she could only judge of the exterior, which at least seemed so much more brilliant than her own. They had friends, connexions whose *crédit* was mutual, fortune, and a defined place in society; she was an orphan, poor and dependent. Many who hated and yet cringed to the Mancinis took a sort of petty revenge in slights shewn to a favourite without influence; she pined under a

constant sense of isolation, ever most painful when felt in a crowd. She was a spectator, not a partaker, of the gaiety around ; for, in truth, gaiety must make some small appeal to our vanity before it is enjoyed. The dance, to be delightful, must have an interest in the partner, or the éclat of display ; and both these attractions were wanting to Francesca. In the numbers that surrounded her, there was not one individual for whom she cared, few who even honoured her with passing notice ; and she daily heard the beauty and grace extolled to the skies which could not for a moment bear comparison with her own.

One would think that, in society, beauty, instead of lying on the surface, was in the mine, and required discovery ; the majority would never discover the loveliness of the *Venus de Medici*, unless it were pointed out to them. Francesca's feelings were those of all whom a chance circumstance has placed in some brilliant circle without the acknowledged rank or fortune necessary to make their right of entrance ; and yet with an innate consciousness of superiority, which makes neglect more bitter, by adding to it a sense of injustice.

There were many who would have felt nothing of all this—who would have made their way by

little and little—who would either have been useful or agreeable, as might have suited the occasion, till they reached an elevation astonishing even to themselves, when the sneer might be remembered and the scorn retorted, as no advantage was longer to be obtained by endurance. Thus, as usual, ending the career of flattery by insolence.

Francesca was at once too simple and too high-minded ; simple as regarded worldly knowledge, but high-minded, as feeling and talent ever are. With her, time passed on, divided between disgust and indifference ; or an increasing anxiety respecting her connexion with Evelyn. He still urged a secret marriage, but now she no longer found it difficult to refuse. Fidelity to her early vow yet appeared a duty ; however, like most proofs of faith, it was to be put off as long as possible.

CHAPTER XIX.

“ ‘Tis a dark labyrinth the human heart.”

YOUNG.

FRANCESCA one evening attended Madame de Mercœur to the small circle allowed entrance to the Queen's dressing-room. The morning had been one of great fatigue, so that but few of the court were admitted; and Anne of Austria herself was in that demi-toilette so favourable to the twilight of beauty. She wore a loose dress of gray silk, edged with black, and fastened with loops of pearl. A portion of her still beautiful hair was parted in two rich auburn bands on her forehead; while the rest was hidden by a long black crape veil, which hung nearly to her feet, and set off the exquisite fairness of her skin, the more striking as she wore no rouge. It was difficult to suppose her the mother of the young man who leant on the back of her chair; for Louis looked as much older than he really was as she looked younger.

It was said of Anne of Austria, after she had been some time Regent, that her misfortunes had been her only attraction ;—to them might be added her appearance ; it was the very reverse of her character, in the sensitive and changeable complexion, and its long-retained youthfulness. Yet few had grown more old in worldliness and deception—forgetful in friendship, and vindictive in resentment. She had all the faults peculiar to very weak people—faults which are of the meanest order ; violent, for it requires strength of mind to curb emotion ; obstinate, for with the obstinate opinion is made up of habit and conceit ; and cunning, for cunning is the genius of the fool. It is difficult to account for the influence acquired over her by Cardinal Mazarin, unless we adopt the belief of their private marriage ; for in their connexion there was something of the authority of the husband, but none of the devotion of the lover. His manner to her was abrupt, often harsh ; it implied the necessity for yielding. *La haute dévotion*, to use an untranslatable phrase of the time, to which she was addicted, belonged less to the mistress, whose chains may be regretted and broken, than to the wife, whose repentance comes *un peu tard*, and who may as well make her obedience matter of conscience. Her conduct,

too, after his death, was very like the conduct of those who are always “ wonderfully supported ;” suited also to her particular situation, in which there was so little need for keeping up the semblance of grief, and in strict accordance with her own paramount selfishness. When those around her thought to pay their court by exaggerating the merits of the deceased, she exclaimed, “ *Mon Dieu !* we must drop the subject—I am sure the King is sick of it; we have really enough to do, without wasting time in useless words.” It would be no uncharitable supposition were we to conclude, that newly recovered liberty—that word which always appears so charming—was sufficiently agreeable to afford a widow’s consolation.

Francesca—who, like all persons of naturally fine taste that have lived much in solitude, was keenly alive to the charms of manner—fixed her whole attention on the card-table where the Queen was playing. She was struck with the grace which made the common courtesies of the game appear like personal compliment, while the caressing air with which she occasionally addressed individuals standing round seemed at once so pleasing and so much in earnest. “ How is it possible,” thought the young Italian, “ that one so fascinating could ever have been neglected by her husband, and the

object of hatred to the fierce and insolent faction so recently subdued?"

Her meditation was interrupted by an unusual bustle in the antechamber, when, before the pages could announce her, the Queen of Sweden walked, or rather ran, into the room. Advancing straight to the Queen, she exclaimed, "A thousand congratulations—I have just heard of the taking of Valence, and could not rest till I had rejoiced with you on the success of your arms."

Victory is an agreeable subject, and the visitor and her compliments were equally well received.

"You may give me credit for sincerity," continued she, "as there is some selfishness in it. It hurts one's vanity to be mistaken; and you know I prophesied the success of the fleur-de-lis."

"Valence," observed M. de Nogent, one of the party at the card-table, "was besieged a hundred years since by the French army, but unsuccessfully; the fort has never before been taken, and—"

"And you should have been there," interrupted Christina abruptly, "with your long stories of a hundred years since; I would rather hear them a hundred years hence." Then turning, with a singular change of countenance from harshness to

extreme sweetness, to Madame de Mercœur, “ I give you joy that your husband should be the first conqueror of this redoubtable Valence.”

“ I deserve,” replied the Duchesse, “ some compensation for the anxiety I have endured.”

“ Anxiety! nonsense!” exclaimed the Swede; “ a man is never in his proper element but when fighting. I am persuaded that war was always meant to be the one great luxury of the human race. War calls out all our good qualities; courage teaches a man to respect himself—and self-respect is at once the beginning and the guarantee of excellence. Besides, a campaign teaches patience, generosity, and exertion. So much for the *morale*; and as to the enjoyment, *pardieu!* I can imagine nothing beyond the excitement of leading a charge of cavalry.”

“ Alas, Madam,” said the King, smiling, “ why cannot I offer you the bâton of a marshal?”

“ You cannot lament,” returned she, “ the impossibility more than I do. What could God mean by sending me into the world a woman?—But let us change this mournful subject—it really affects my feelings.”

“ I am rejoiced,” observed Louis, “ that you have recovered from the ennui of Messieurs les Jésuites’ tragedy.”

"I protest," was her reply, "equally against confession or tragedy from them; their rules are too lax in both."

"You do not seem," said the Queen, evidently wishing to change the subject just started, "to have been much pleased with our dramatic representations; but we have not been fortunate—our actors are generally more amusing."

"I suppose so," replied Christina, "as you keep them still. But I see I have interrupted your game; go on, and do not mind me—I should like to have another victory to congratulate you upon."

Crossing the room, she seated herself on one chair, while, drawing another towards her, she placed her feet upon it, and thus stretched out negligently, began talking in a low tone to the King and Mademoiselle Mancini.

Francesca had now an opportunity of observing her more closely, and found that her appearance, if equally singular, was more picturesque than she had heard described. Her dress was odd enough, half-masculine, half-feminine; but it became her. She wore a sort of jacket of bright red camlet, richly braided with gold and silver lace; a fringe of which also hung from her gray petticoat, which was short enough to shew her feet and ankles,

whose small size was rendered more remarkable by the peculiar-shaped boot. A crimson scarf, flung over one shoulder, adroitly hid the defect in her figure ; and round her throat was a neckcloth edged with point lace, and fastened with a crimson riband. She was delicately fair, with an aquiline nose, and a mouth the size of which was forgotten in its white teeth and pleasant smile. She wore a peruke of very fair golden hair ; and herein was shewn the lurking spirit of female vanity : her own tresses had been very beautiful ; in some whim she had had them shaven off, but the colour of the peruke had been most assiduously assorted to them. Her eyes, large, blue, bright, and restless, were her most remarkable feature, perhaps from their constant employ ; they seemed perpetually on the watch, and she had also a custom of fixing them with singular intentness on the person to whom she spoke. It was said this habit had somewhat startled the Bishop of Amiens, whom she selected for her confessor ; instead of the down-cast eyes to which he had been accustomed, the royal penitent, who then knelt at his feet, fixed her clear piercing orbs full on his face, till the good father was all but stared out of countenance. She was small and slight ; and the impression she gave, as she lounged on her two

seats, swinging to and fro her black hat and feathers, was of a fair and pretty boy, clever, and somewhat spoiled by indulgence. She commenced her conversation with the King and his companion by saying, "Pray, do not suspend your fleurettes on my account; next to being in love myself, I like to see other people in love. I shall be a charming confidante."

"Too charming," replied Marie, "not to be dangerous."

"Very prettily said, but more pretty than true. Falling in love is quite out of my way. I do not often offer up thanksgivings; but when I do, and turn in my mind what to be grateful about, I always give thanks for my indifference."

"You are selfish in your gratitude," said Louis.

"A very common case. But, truly, I have become too worldly, have too many other things in both head and heart, to find a place for love—it takes up too much room. But this I do say; if there be an intense, overpowering happiness in this world, it is first love, unsullied, unfrittered away by a thousand vain considerations—deep, fervent, and engrossing. Of what avail is a throne, save to share it with a beloved one? One with whom the deck of the frailest bark that ever cut my own stormy seas would be paradise, and with-

out whom the whole wide world is but a desert. Ay, such a love is indeed heaven or hell!" And she flung herself back in her chair, and gave way to one of those fits of absence in which she was accustomed to indulge, with equal disregard of time, place, and company.

The young King looked tenderly at Mademoiselle Mancini, who gave him a glance quite as tender in return—not, however, unobserved. His mother had been for some time past a displeased spectator of a predilection which might become dangerous. With her usual dissimulation, she refrained from evincing any outward sign of uneasiness, and, beckoning Madame de Mercœur, apparently made some request. Madame de Mercœur crossed the room to Francesca, and informed her that the Queen had heard of her musical skill, and wished herself to judge of a voice that had been so extolled.

Such a request was a command, though one she felt inclined, had it been possible, to disobey. Her vanity had been too little called forth for her to rejoice in display; she was too indifferent to her audience to have any anxiety about pleasing them—and she was perfectly aware of her own powers. Moreover, she was actuated by a feeling between indignation and disdain at being thus

called on to minister to their pleasure who would never dream of contributing to hers. Still, her lute was brought ; and, with the first tone awakened from the strings, she grew timid, as if she only then noted how much the attention of the circle was fixed upon her. At first her voice was tremulous and low, but it soon asserted its delicious power. Rich, deep, and melancholy, it was one of those which appeal even more to the heart than to the ear—one of those which, by some subtle spell—music's best secret—seem to call up every sad and sweet thought which memory has garnered for years.

Every one was surprised, or rather touched, into warm expressions of delight. The Queen's quick eye glanced from Louis, who stood in fixed attention, to the singer, who, far more confused by the praise than the exertion, rose from the kneeling position, whose very humility had in it such grace, with that rich flushed colour, so lovely in a face usually pale, and with downcast eyes, whose darkness was only indicated by the black and curled eyelash.

“ How very lovely ! ” said the Queen in a whisper, but loud enough for her son to hear, who now approached, and took himself the lute from Francesca. Christina, first indulging in a quick

and instantly suppressed smile, addressed a few words, more kind even than flattering, to the singer ; and Francesca, who an hour before had been as much neglected as the old fauteuil by which she had leant half concealed, was now the centre of a little circle of admirers and flatterers. Young, and a woman, it would be too much to suppose that it was very disagreeable to her.

“ I think,” said Anne to Madame de Mercœur, “ we must obtain your protégée’s services for our intended masque ; however, I shall leave that to you young people to settle,” turning to Louis as she spoke.

The Swedish Queen saw at once that the day for civility to Mademoiselle Mancini was over, at least in the royal mother’s presence, and that she had lost some ground by her incautious encouragement ; besides, the King’s ready and obvious admiration did not say much for his stability.

“ He is too young to be trusted,” thought she ; “ it takes half a dozen fantasies to prepare the way for *une grande passion*. Madame la Mère at present——”

Christina drew near to the card-table, and, lolling upon it with her usual indifference, began to watch the progress of the game, which was now resumed. Suddenly she snatched up the Queen’s

hand, and, holding it by the wrist, let the light fall upon it, as if it had been a toy she wished to examine. “ Ah, *mon Dieu!* how perfect! Talk of the works of art as the standard of ideal beauty —look at this work of nature. I consider my voyage from Rome amply repaid by the sight of the most lovely object in the world. In my country they would say you had the hand of a water-sprite —white as the earliest snow. And you have been gathering roses, I see,”—turning the little palm, so that the delicate pink inside became visible.

“ Flatterer !” exclaimed the Queen, and holding up the said hand in a menacing attitude, but with no appearance of displeasure.

Christina snatched both hands, kissed them, and, without further farewell, walked out of the room, half-singing Scarron’s celebrated lines :

“ Elle avoit au bout de ses manches
Une paire de mains si blanches,
Que j’eu voudrois être souffleté.”

She left her character behind her,—character which usually has the fate of King Pelias, namely, that of being torn to pieces by its dearest friends. The Swedish Queen, however, escaped wonderfully well. She had outraged every rule of the court, mocked their proprieties, and in-

fringed their decorums ; yet they talked of her genius, and called her *la Reine philosophique*. Well—audacity, oddity, and flattery, are the three graces which make their way in modern society !

CHAPTER XX.

“ Si vous eussiez vécu du temps de Gabrielle
 Je ne sais pas ce qu'on eût dit de vous,
 Mais on n'aurait point parlé d'elle.”

VOLTAIRE.

THE next morning Francesca received a letter from Guido, the first she had ever possessed. Even in our time, when they are so many in number—things of morning, noon, and night occurrence—a letter is a delight. We never hear the postman's knock without a vague sort of hope that it is for us. A letter, too, is one of the few mysteries that yet remain—a small and a transitory one, but still a mystery, though but of a moment. We have to open it. If these are a pleasure even now, what must they have been when an epistle was an event in a life, and when rarely any but a beloved hand traced the characters?

“ I have such a happiness in store for you,” said Madame de Mercœur; “ now do guess.”

“ Guido!—what have you to tell me of him?”

“ Ah, now, how came you to think of him at once ? But I have not the heart to disappoint those eager eyes—so take it ;” and from a packet by her pillow she took the letter and gave it to her.

Francesca felt choked—the tears rose—she tried to thank the Duchesse, but her voice was gone ; she kissed her, by way of gratitude, and left the room—she could not bear to read the letter but by herself. Shutting herself in, she opened the scroll, and read it hastily to the end—then began it over again, but slowly this time, as if she feared to lose a word. Again she commenced it, but stopped suddenly ; and the tears, which had hitherto only stood in her eyes, now dropped thick and fast upon the paper. There was something unsatisfactory in its contents—they were too brief and too abrupt ; Guido said nothing of his own health, or his own feelings—and what did his sister care for else ?—what to her were the Duke, the Duchess, or even Modena itself ? nay, she felt very disrespectfully towards the Madonna, which he described as divine.

“ How very unkind !” exclaimed she ; “ he knows how anxious I am about him, and he tells me nothing—he may be ill or well for aught he says about it.” She turned the paper over to see if any little corner had escaped her notice, but she had

read it far too carefully. "How differently I should have written to him! and yet, poor Guido, I fear he is unwell—hurried evidently, and he will have the more to say when we meet;" and once more she read the paragraph mentioning his speedy return.

Francesca's was a grievance of which most of her sex have to complain; a man's letter is always the most unsatisfactory thing in the world. There are none of those minute details which are such a solace to feminine anxiety; the mere fact of writing, always seems sufficient to content a masculine conscience. Guido, therefore, was guilty of no uncommon failing; and could Francesca have looked into the heart whose emotions were so ill depicted on that brief scroll, she would have seen how tender was the affection which clung to her image, as the only object beloved—the one light of a dreaming and melancholy existence. But for her sake, he would not have returned to France; for his absence had made his own country seem lovelier than ever. His earlier visions returned upon him; his despondency, which, amid realities, had become embittered by mortifications, here took the tone of poetry, and but shewed itself in the deeper sense with which he lingered beside the ruined temple, or gathered the wild

flowers, and took a fanciful pleasure in seeing them wither.

The imagination shuns to reveal its workings, unless it can clothe them in some lovely and palpable shape, and create into existence the high romance, the mournful song, the animated canvass, or the carved marble ; pride then comes to the aid of the gifted one, and says, “ Lo ! these are the fruits of those hours the busier worldlings deem given but to idle fantasies ! ” But Guido knew that his summer idlesse had been idlesse indeed. He expected so much from himself, that he believed Francesca must expect something too—and he had nothing to tell her ; and this inward consciousness she so little suspected, contributed much towards the constrained tone of the letter.

Gradually it gave its possessor more pleasure. Francesca smiled at what she now termed unreasonable sensitiveness, and began to reckon how long it must be before her brother’s return. Moreover, the very mention of Italy brought to her all the most cheerful recollections of her childhood. She recalled the old hall, with its storied frescoes—the woods, where so many mornings had passed so happily away—the little river, where they used to launch their light boats, made of the green rushes which grew beside ; she recalled the blithe

chirp of the cicala in the fragrant grass—and the gleam of the fire-flies, glittering by twilight amid the boughs of the myrtle. “ Ah !” exclaimed she, “ we will soon return thither, and be happy again !”

Francesca forgot that she must take back with her an altered heart. Her hand fell by chance on her lute, which lay near—it gave forth a sweet but hollow sound, as if the wind had swept over it, and, almost unconsciously, her fingers ran over the notes of an old familiar air ; she started, for it seemed almost like a reproach, it had been such a favourite of Evelyn’s. The recollection at once dissipated her pleasant reverie : “ Alas !” she exclaimed, “ is it he or I that is changed ?”

Without waiting to decide, she suddenly remembered that Madame de Mercoeur would marvel at her long absence, and hastened to join her. She was risen, and seated before her glass, while her woman was arranging her long fair hair. The Chevalier de Joinville leant opposite ; Evelyn, with a true Englishman’s habit, was fastening and unfastening a little enamelled box, which he had taken up under plea of admiring her portrait on the lid ; and, seated on the arm of a fauteuil, instead of the chair itself, was the Queen of Sweden, talking with great rapidity.

“ Well, finding remonstrance vain, and tired with urging that to-day was a very particular fast indeed, the King endeavoured to snatch from Monsieur the atrocious bouillon, with its still more atrocious meat. The Duke of Anjou resisted; but finding his brother strongest, fairly flung plate and all into his face. Our pious Louis laughed at first; but Mademoiselle Mancini making it matter of personal dignity, he grew angry, and said, ‘ That but for the Queen’s presence, he would have turned Monsieur out of the room. Meat and temper being lost alike, *la bonne Maman* interfered, but in vain; and the Duke sought his chamber in high dudgeon. Ah, the blessings of Providence will certainly rest upon a monarch so pious.”

The rest of the party were too prudent to comment; and Madame de Mercœur asked Christina if Mademoiselle was as beautiful as she was allowed to be?

“ Even in exile?” said Evelyn.

“ Superb!” replied the Queen, after having given the speaker a look, as much as to say, ‘ I take your sarcasm;’ “ tall—fair,—a fitting Bel-lona for the Prince of Condé. The comedy of the League ought to have ended in their marriage. *Vraiment*, Mademoiselle has exerted herself for an establishment. She was devout for the Emperor.

I heard that she left off powder, patches, and rouge, for a month when his third consort died, and he grew religious—whether out of grief or gratitude, I never heard ; then she grew factious, for the sake of your own King, and thought to strew the way to the altar with straws* instead of flowers. I applaud her spirit in fighting for a crown."

" I marvel," interrupted De Joinville, " at such a sentiment from your Majesty."

" Poor child !" replied she, bursting into one of her abrupt, but musical laughs, " where can you have lived, not to know we never care for what we have ?—But to return to Mademoiselle ; her pride unabated, though I heard that your uncle declared, that the shot she fired from the Bastile killed her husband. Pray did he say so ?"

" Really, your Majesty," answered Madame de Mercœur, " seems too well acquainted with all our affairs to ask any questions of me."

" Especially such as you do not deem fitting to answer. Pitying Mademoiselle's seclusion, I did my best to entertain her, and, by way of news, told her that her former lover, the King of England, was talked of for Mademoiselle de Longue-

* Straws were the badge of the Leaguers.

ville. *Diable!* but her eyes flashed fire. ‘ I owe it, Madame, to myself to disbelieve the story ; convinced that no one, who had ever once raised his hopes to myself, could stoop to Mademoiselle de Longueville.’ ”

“ Now, by St. George ! ” interrupted Evelyn, “ the daughter of Henri Quatre was ready enough to marry his grandfather ; and, let the present madness of our islands pass away, and the daughter of the Duke of Orleans may repent her disdain, or rather her miscalculation.”

“ Circumstances are every thing,” rocking her heavy seat backwards and forwards.

“ I have been busy this morning,” continued De Joinville, “ consoling beauty in distress and in debt. Madame de Chatillion and Fouquet have quarrelled ! ”

“ What ! he, the most devoted and most despairing of lovers, who talked in the same breath of her charms and her cruelty—who accumulated wealth but to lavish it on an idol ! ” exclaimed Madame de Mercoeur ; “ why, at the last fair, taste was of no use, for every thing pretty had been selected beforehand. They said, Madame first went round to choose, and l’Abbé followed to buy ; and the various presents were sent in as mysteriously as fairy gifts.”

“ But the Abbé is an inglorious successor,” remarked Christina, “ to the Prince of Condé, to your English King—both of whom wore the chains of this triumphant beauty.”

“ Circumstances are every thing, as your Majesty has just observed,” replied De Joinville; “ the Condé is absent, the King poor; Fouquet is present, and rich, and, what is more, generous. Besides, he helped her out of one of those adventures in which her folly—she calls it ambition—is perpetually involving her. Madame de Chatillion was threatened with a *lettre de cachet*, for her suspected correspondence with Monsieur le Prince, and Monsieur l’Abbé took upon himself the responsibility, answered for her loyalty, and made his house her prison or her palace.”

“ I never saw a house more splendidly furnished,” observed Christina; “ he gave me a collation; and there I saw Madame de Chatillion glittering with gems; her diamond earrings alone might have lighted up the room. She shewed me her portrait, written by herself. I only remember what she states of her mouth, which, she says, was not only beautiful and red, but had a thousand little natural airs and graces not to be found in any other mouth. Oh, I must not forget her figure, which, she assured the reader, was the best-made and

the finest that could be seen : nothing could be more regular, more graceful, or more easy. Certainly it is pleasant to appreciate one's own perfections ; it puts one on good terms with others, by first being on such with ourselves. But now for the quarrel."

" Madame de Chatillion," answered the Chevalier, " in the first haleyon hours which her smiles created for l'Abbé, had resigned to him some letters of M. le Prince ; she also, in due time, favoured him with divers addressed to himself. These precious epistles were placed in certain caskets, and treasured like—really, my experience affords me nothing sufficiently precious for a likeness. One fine morning, when l'Abbé Fouquet was in the country, she goes to his house ; the servants, knowing her authority was absolute with their master, supposed it was to be equally absolute with themselves, and admitted her to his cabinet. Once there, she makes good use of her time, and retakes all those said letters ; considering, perhaps, that what is said may be unsaid, but what is written remains in evidence against you."

" Love-letters are very foolish things," muttered Christina.

" L'Abbé returned," pursued the Chevalier,

“ and at once missed his caskets, and next heard of his visitor. In despair, he rushed into Madame de Chatillion’s presence, and said every thing that could be said by a man very angry and very much in love. Words were followed by actions: he vented his rage on the magnificent mirrors, till the floor was covered with shattered glass, every fragment adding to his misery, by another reflection of Madame’s beautiful face. He went away at last, threatening to send and take away furniture, plate, and jewels,—all being gifts of his own. Madame de Chatillion acted upon the threat, took down hangings, &c., and removed to Madame de St. Chaumont. This is the tragedy:—now for the farce.

“ While staying with Madame de Porcinne, in the Convent de la Miséricorde, Madame de Chatillion was amazed by the appearance of l’Abbé and his mother in the parlour.”

“ Ah,” cried Christina, “ I remember the old lady—simple, kind-hearted, and evidently quite astonished by every body and every thing.”

“ ‘ What,’ said *la belle dédaigneuse*, ‘ do I see? —dares this man appear in my presence?’ The Abbé’s answer was couched in the most approved terms of love and remorse,—his despair quite touched the hearts of the three old ladies. ‘ Re-

member,' remonstrated Madame de Porcinne to the angry beauty, ' that you are a Christian, and that you should lay down all your animosities at the foot of the cross.' ' In the name of Jesus !' exclaimed the Provençal *Mère de la Miséricorde*, for even her feelings were affected, ' look upon him with pity.' The poor old mother next took up the petition : ' Madame, I implore, on my knees, that my son may just haunt your footsteps.' Neither l'Abbé nor his three old women succeeded in softening the angry goddess. It is, however, rumoured, that certain offerings at her shrine have since had considerable effect, and he is now beginning to hope that, perhaps, he may again be suffered in Madame de Chatillion's sight."

Other visitors entering interrupted the thread of the discourse ; and Evelyn took the opportunity of approaching Francesca, who was seated in a window, a little behind the others. " I congratulate you," said he.

" Ah, I am so happy !" was her reply, supposing that he alluded to Guido's letter, and without giving herself time to consider, that it was impossible for him to know of its arrival.

" You are not aware of the effect you produced !"

“ What do you mean ? ” ejaculated his listener, in the utmost astonishment.

“ Nonsense ! Do you think,” replied he, “ that I have been the last to hear of the beautiful Italian and her lute ? ”

“ I thought,” said Francesca, “ you were speaking of the letter I have this morning had from Guido.”

“ Pshaw ! — what is a letter compared to your last night’s triumph ? Joinville told me you had never looked more lovely, and that Louis never moved his eyes from your face the whole time you were singing.”

“ Very pleasant to be stared out of countenance ! ” returned she, colouring.

“ I would have Mademoiselle Mancini look to her chains,” said Evelyn.

Francesca remained silent, from vexation and anger ; and he continued : —

“ But I must say farewell now. Lord Craven is to ride by the wood ; and, even if it should be observed, our meeting will seem accidental,—I wish for no appearance of connexion with his party, for that would end all my plans. Ah ! my fair Italian ; what with their anxiety and your cruelty, I have enough on my hands ! ”

Francesca saw him depart with that profound depression of spirits which usually followed their interviews. She was vexed at the want of sympathy which he shewed with her joy or her affection,—he had not even thought of inquiring after Guido. It seemed so very unkind! Then she was mortified at his ready allusion to the admiration she had excited,—surely he ought not to have been pleased by it. A lover owes his mistress a little jealousy. Indifference to the homage she receives may shew reliance, but it is a bad compliment. She was roused from her reverie by a hand laid upon her arm; she looked up, and saw the Swedish Queen.

“A cold look at parting, and a sad brow afterwards, are bad signs. You know the old fable—there is little profit in leaving the substance for the shadow.”

Francesca only looked her surprise.

“Some shadows,” continued Christina, “are enough to dazzle such young sight as yours; yet I warn you of trusting to them.”

“I have little,” said Francesca, and her eyes filled with tears; for there was a kindness in the speaker’s voice, which, in her present depressed mood, touched her powerfully, “to trust in, save Heaven!”

“ Poor child!” returned her companion ; “ why did you leave Italy ?”

“ Ah, you may well warn me of trusting to shadows ! why, indeed, did we leave it ?”

“ Because there was a lover in the case. Well, well ; he is a handsome and noble-looking cavalier. Do not quarrel with him again, because he is jealous that others beside himself think you have a bright blush and a sweet voice.”

Giving her a good-humoured smile, Christina moved away, to Francesca’s great relief. What could she say to so complete a misconception ? The chamber was by this time cleared of visitors, and she was about to thank Madame de Mercœur for her letter, when Mademoiselle Mancini entered. Without saluting either, she flung herself into a chair, and exclaimed, “ I suppose, Henriette, you are well aware of the fine marriage about to take place ?”

“ I know of none,” answered Madame de Mercœur.

“ Oh, then my uncle has kept you equally in the dark ; but the Queen this morning congratulated me—me, forsooth!—of the approaching alliance between Mademoiselle Martinozzi and the Prince de Conti. She shewed me the pearls she meant for a wedding present.”

“A splendid match for our pretty cousin! Well, she is a sweet creature; and I rejoice in her good fortune.”

“You do?” exclaimed Marie, her cheek flushing with anger; “very kind, very sisterly, indeed! No consideration for my interest!”

“How does it affect you, but advantageously?—such an alliance is an honour to our whole family.”

“Surely I am as well fitted to be Princesse de Conti as my cousin?”

“And the gentleman’s choice is to go for nothing? You remember the Prince always greatly admired Mademoiselle Martinozzi.”

“The Cardinal has taught you your lesson:—I meet with the same unkindness from you all; but if he does not attend to my interest from affection, he may from weariness of my complaints, and of them I promise him the full benefit.”

“For shame, Marie!—think how very kind he is to us!”

“To you, I presume, you mean.”

“For pity’s sake, let us drop the subject; and do tell us all about the quarrel between the King and the Duke of Anjou.”

“I have nothing to tell, but that it is ridicu-

lous for Louis to be so absolutely governed by his mother as he is. He hears with her ears, and sees with her eyes—I suppose, he will soon eat with her mouth!"

" Do not look so angry, Marie ; it quite spoils your pretty face."

" I do not care how I look ; and if you have nothing more pleasant to say, I wish you good morning."

" Nay, now, don't run away ; we shall find something more agreeable, if you will but have patience."

" Indeed, I should not have come in at all, but that the Queen requested I would give the plan of the masque to la Signora Carrara, and remind her of her engagement." So saying, she threw the roll of paper on the table, and left the room.

" I am so delighted at the fancy which the Queen has taken to my little Francesca," said the Duchesse, kindly. " You must look your best at the masque. There is an old picture of my uncle's, whose costume will suit you exactly—we will go and study it."

Madame de Mercœur was one of those who are happy in their amiability. Gentle and kind, rather than acute or strong in feeling, she relied

upon the affection she inspired, because she had no exaggerated estimate within to whose test she applied it ; the expression she witnessed came up to her expectation. Hence she was confiding and unsuspecting. She could comprehend the under motives of an action, when explained ; but she would never have penetrated them without such explanation. This extreme goodness and simplicity of character made Henriette her uncle's favourite. None but worldly people appreciate simplicity. He felt safe with her, and he believed in her attachment, because he saw that it was natural to her to love.

Liking Francesca warmly herself, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that others should like her too. It never would have entered into her head, that the Queen hourly saw, with more and more suspicion, her sister's influence increasing, and that she calculated on Francesca's attraction as a passing lure to Louis. The friendless Italian was a much safer person than the niece of the all-powerful minister, whose ambition would not stop but at the throne. Francesca might be allowed to detach him from Mademoiselle Mancini, and could then be easily flung aside. The King's devotion was the next engine to be brought into play ; and

the Queen felt sure that his conscience was still sufficiently tender for alarm.

But Marie was too dangerous ; for though the very lilies of France would blush at such an alliance, still it was possible ; and Anne of Austria was too false herself to place any reliance on the Cardinal's professions, that he would be the first to oppose such a union. The temptation of the crown for his niece seemed too great to be resisted ; and the Queen thought it but prudent to diminish it as much as she could. Francesca's beauty caught her attention ; it could not be better employed than in diverting Louis from Mademoiselle Mancini ; and that once effected, there was a convent ready for her, and her own authority and his confessor for the King. Marie, too, would be piqued by the prospect of her cousin's brilliant marriage ; and let her hopes be once turned towards a similar establishment, and no unnecessary delay should ensue in finding one for her.

There is a story somewhere of an eastern king, whose delight it was to assemble his subjects in a glittering hall, where they were crowned with roses, and drank the purple wine from cups of gold ; but beneath them were caverns and chains. Suddenly, the floor gave way, and the guests were

precipitated into the darkness below, there to meditate at leisure over their former blind enjoyment. Human life is just such a tyrant—the pleasure hides the pain ; but not long—soon, very soon, are we precipitated into the depths of experience and regret !

CHAPTER XXI.

“ When factious Rage to cruel exile drove
The Queen of Beauty and the court of Love,
The Muses droop’d, with their forsaken arts,
And the sad Cupids broke their useless darts.”

DRYDEN.

COURTED, flattered, and caressed, Francesca could scarcely believe such a change could have so rapidly taken place, and on what, moreover, appeared such slight grounds. Though more thoughtful than Madame de Mercœur, yet it asked far more knowledge of society—that wilderness of small intricacies—for her to penetrate into the motives of those who seemed so suddenly struck with her fascination ; but she was too clear-headed to be deceived, and set it all down under one general belief in caprice. Still, it was pleasant to have a little circle gather round her, where before she had sat in solitary silence ; it was pleasant, also, to have half a dozen cavaliers for the dance, of which she had hitherto been little more than a spectator ; and it was not very disagreeable to

hear how beautiful she was, from even the elderly dames of the court.

The gardens around Compiegne were very extensive ; and sunshine and the open air seemed to give something of their own freedom to the gaiety which prevailed.

Most days, Francesca was called on to sing to the Queen, and, by some chance or other, Louis was constantly present, and often entered into conversation with her. He talked to her of Rome, and appeared to take great pleasure in exciting her enthusiasm, which dwelt delightedly on the by-gone glories of the Eternal City ; or took a more touching tone, when painting its present desolation,—yet lovely, and even sacred, in its ruins. It was very new to him, and herein was the secret charm.

Mademoiselle Mancini pouted, and revenged herself by an affectation of extreme intimacy ; whispering to him even in his mother's presence, who now scarcely concealed her displeasure ; and by tormenting her uncle with perpetual reproaches for what she termed his neglect of her interests. An old Italian exclaimed one day, as she left Mazarin's chamber, “ I hear, Signora, many complaints of my master ; but, truly, you avenge them all.”

In the mean time, Francesca's favour with the Queen apparently increased daily ; she was even named to accompany her *en calèche*, with Madame de Mercœur and Christina, the day previous to the departure of the latter.

The morning was delicious, and, arrived at a sheltered portion of the gardens, they alighted for the sake of walking. In the first avenue which they entered, they met Voiture. Voiture belonged to a race of poets essentially French, who sacrificed to the graces instead of the muses ; to whom Cupid, with his wings and arrows, was the ideal of love, and whose art of poetry consisted in epigram, tourne, readiness, and facility. Mademoiselle expressed the spirit of the times, when she said, “Trifles weary me, excepting verses, and I am fond of them.”

But the passion which gives its deep and melancholy tone to our English imaginative literature was unknown across the channel. Feeling never got beyond sentiment ; and that *bien arrangé*. The heart's faith was but *la galanterie*—a term, by the by, which our word *gallantry* does not translate. Voiture carried this talent to perfection. His letters were charming—full of point and flattery ; and his conversation sparkled with bon-mots and compliments. The Queen beckoned

him to approach, and the whole party seated themselves by a fountain, beneath the extended boughs of a large old chestnut-tree.

“A scene from Boccaccio,” said Christina ; “nothing wanting but the lovers.”

“I should like,” said Anne, “to know of what M. Voiture is thinking,—he seems so lost in meditation !”

“It is sometimes,” replied the poet, “dangerous to give utterance to one’s thoughts ; I claim full pardon for the presumption of mine.”

“On one condition,” said the Queen—“that you give them expression.”

Voiture smiled, and, fixing his eyes on the shadow of the Queen in the water, repeated the following verses :—

“ Je pensais que la destinée,
Après tant d’injustes malheurs,
Vous a justement couronnée
De gloire, d’éclat, et d’honneurs :
Mais que vous étiez plus heureuse,
Lorsque vous étiez autrefois,
Je ne veut pas dire amoureuse
La rime le veut toutefois.

“ Je pensais que ce pauvre amour,
Qui toujours vous prêta ses armes,
Est banni loin de votre cour,
Sans ses traits, son arc, ses charmes,

Et ce que je puis profiter,
 En passant près de vous ma vie,
 Si vous pouvez si maltraiter
 Ceux qui vous ont si bien servie.

“ Je pensais, car nous autres poètes
 Nous pensons extravagamment,
 Ce que dans l'humeur où vous êtes,
 Vous feriez si dans ce moment
 Vous avisiez en cette place
 Venir le Duc de Bokingham ?
 Et lequel serait en disgrâce
 De lui ou du Père Vincent ?”

“ Have I exceeded my poetical license ?” said Voiture, dropping on one knee.

“ Ah ! the follies of youth are now as nothing in my sight, God be praised !” said Anne ; “ I have long learnt to fix my wandering thoughts on graver subjects than the vain flatteries in which the young delight. Still, your verses are charming, and you must copy them for me.” She extended her hand, which Voiture kissed with all possible devotion.

“ I do not often,” replied he, “ task my memory with such trifles ; but your Majesty’s commands would impress the very air that passes on my mind.”

“ I should like,” interrupted Christina, “ to have seen the Duke of Buckingham ; there was

something picturesque and romantic about him, infinitely to my taste ;—and was he so very handsome ?”

“ Very : but we are talking such nonsense !” answered Anne ; not, however, with an air as if the nonsense displeased her.

“ I have heard,” continued Christina, “ that it was quite a passion *de Roman*, and that the war with England was entirely caused by *l'amour de vos beaux yeux*.”

“ Rather a desperate method of recommending himself to my favour.”

“ Ah ! women like to have desperate things done on their account ; besides, people in love never calculate on probabilities. I daresay, the Duke dreamed of winning you, like an Amadis, sword in hand.”

“ And, like most dreamers, woke, and found out his mistake.”

“ *Pardieu !*—it does not the least surprise me : if people will be beautiful, they must take the consequence. By the by, what trash the Queen of England talked the other night, when she contended, that no woman retained her beauty after five-and-twenty. I am sure, in this kingdom, such a speech is *lèse-majesté*. But her fault brings its own punishment, for she spoke feelingly. God

knows! there is little vestige of the lovely Henrietts in her care-worn countenance."

Few persons flattered with greater audacity than the ex-Queen of Sweden; but it was amazing how much the appearance of flattery was done away with by her abrupt manner, and seeming carelessness as to whether what she said was even heard. But the discourse was interrupted by the approach of a large party, who, as soon as they perceived the Queen, advanced to pay their court. Among these was Evelyn, who drew near to Francesca with an unusual degree of anxiety.

"Dearest Francesca," he exclaimed, as soon as, by drawing her a little aside, the branches of a flowering shrub somewhat concealed them, "I think I may trust you, and will, therefore, as hastily as possible, make my request. The English Ambassador arrives here to-day, and it is of the utmost consequence that no suspicion should be entertained of my correspondence with Queen Henrietts,—all my present sources of information would be at once closed. The visit is unexpected; and I dare not risk sending, still less dare I myself communicate, any intelligence. Will you take charge of a letter, and watch your opportunity for giving it unperceived?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Francesca; "and I think

I could manage to do it this evening ; as, after the play, there is a sort of *fête* at the Cardinal's."

" Good : the Queen will be sure to be there."

" Where is the letter ?"

" Not yet written ; but I will venture into the theatre to-night. I will bring you a bouquet of flowers—round them will be a note ; and be careful to excite no suspicion in giving it."

Francesca promised, and the Queen advancing towards the calèche, hastily followed her. The carriage drove off ; though not till Anne had given Voiture a most gracious smile, and bid him remember the verses.

CHAPTER XXII.

“ Crystal and myrrhine cups, embossed with gems
And studs of pearl.”

MILTON.

FRANCESCA that evening awaited the appearance of Evelyn with no little anxiety, which increased on perceiving that she was quite hemmed in by the quick-eyed Christina in front, the Duchesse de Merceur on one side, and, to her great surprise, Louis took his place on the other, and, regardless of the eagerness with which she was watching the stage, drew her into conversation. She could scarcely disguise her preoccupation. Like most persons utterly unused to deception, she could not imagine how it was to be managed ; and her thoughts conjured up every probable and improbable embarrassment that might occur. The actors, too, diverted her attention, with all the fascination their art ever exercises over the unaccustomed ; by degrees her eyes fixed upon the

scene, and she became almost absorbed in the distress of the hero and heroine, who were in their usual difficulties. Her inattention, however, rather amused the King, though the charm with him had lost its illusion from frequent repetition ; yet it was something new to observe it in another. The amusement would not have lasted very long, but Christina, tired of what was going on, addressed herself to him, and satirised the play, unmercifully, but entertainingly.

At this moment Mazarin entered, and Evelyn was in his suite. It had been arranged that his intended invitation should be given personally, as if without premeditation, much ceremony being thus avoided. During the time that the Cardinal was paying his devoirs to the two Queens, Evelyn remained behind, and gradually obtained the vacant place between Francesca and Madame de Mercoeur ; the latter, to whom he more particularly addressed himself, observed, “ What very fragrant flowers ! ” With an air of gallantry, he anxiously selected some of the rarest, and presented them to her ; then turning, as if with a sudden thought, to Francesca, offered her the remainder. She immediately perceived the note around the stems ; and now, while all were engaged with the Cardinal, concealed it with an

ease that astonished herself. Before, however, she could look round, Evelyn had disappeared.

Soon after, Louis resumed his place; and observing the flowers, asked Francesca for one of the roses, which she immediately gave, when, much more to her dismay than to her gratification, he kissed it, and placed it concealed in his bosom, adding, in a low voice, “It is too precious to be worn openly.” Then, as if he were himself confused by what he had said, turned hastily, and began talking to Madame de Mercoeur.

From the theatre they proceeded to the Cardinal’s, where many of the guests were already assembled; among others, the Queen of England and her daughter. There was something in the scene that jarred upon Francesca’s previous sympathy. She, whose councils had done much towards conducting her husband to the scaffold on which he perished—whose rank was a mockery, making her present state of dependence more bitter—an exile in her own country, whose very dreams must be haunted by death and danger; yet there she was seated, the centre of a frivolous circle, and of flatteries whose worthlessness she of all there must best have known. Ah! misfortune ought to have sufficient self-respect for solitude.

For the first time it struck Francesca how exceedingly difficult she would find it to deliver the note with which she had been intrusted. The three Queens were seated at the upper end of the room, surrounded by their attendants, with every eye fixed upon their least movement: what excuse had she for approaching Henriette?—she had never been presented to her, and it was most probable the whole length of the chamber would be between them during the evening. But while she was increasing the difficulty by thinking about it, Madame de Mercoeur, passing her hand through her arm, said, “ You must come with me, Francesca; I want you to see the old portrait I was telling you about the other morning.”

So saying, she led her into a small apartment adjoining. There were three small rooms, which ran one into another. They were alike hung with gray cloth, covered with pictures, while all the light came from above. The picture before which they paused represented one of those ruined fountains so common to Italy. Francesca gazed upon it as if it had been an old friend: many a time, beside such a one, with its carved and broken marble, had she wreathed the acanthus that hung around it, the green and trailing foliage so profuse in the South, into shapes even more fanciful than those

which once suggested the Corinthian capital. The clear blue sky, and the towers of a church in the distance—the sunny foreground—brought the old-accustomed scenes so forcibly to her mind, that for a moment she had forgotten all but themselves.

Madame de Mercœur, though with a kind remembrance of childish habits and haunts, threw around them none of that melancholy which is their poetry, and soon drew her companion's attention to the figure. It was a female in the prime of life, with the colours and rounded form of youth, but with the expression of a more advanced period ; it was wonderful how the painter had contrived to give such determination, nay, even severity, to the brow, and yet retain such sweetness in the lower part of the face. But the mouth was that of a child—so small, so fresh, so red, and parted with a smile so glad, so innocent, and extending its influences to the dimpled cheek and little ivory chin. Yet the nose was high and Roman ; and the eyes, which looked boldly out, seemed to flash fire. The dress was singular ; a green velvet boddice, which fitted tight, and was met at the throat by a chain, or rather collar, of gold. A crimson scarf was round the waist, in which was placed a poniard, whose sheath and handle glittered with gems. The large

loose sleeve was lined with fur, and on each arm was a bracelet. On the one, a plain massive band which matched the collar ; on the other, a serpent ; the tail reached nearly to the elbow, and the head rose a little from the wrist ; the tongue of a ruby, the eyes of large brilliants. The costume was finished by a petticoat of broad alternate stripes of green and crimson, with a deep gold lace. The hair was plaited with bullion and red riband, and then wound round the head, something after the fashion of a turban, save that it entirely displayed the forehead.

“ It is too fierce,” said Louis, who, together with Mazarin, had entered the gallery.

“ Such was the original,” replied Mazarin ; “ she was the wife of a celebrated bandit in the Abruzzi ; and this likeness was its artist’s ransom. It was found in the old castle, which had long been the haunt of a most desperate band. Tradition says she died by her husband’s side, fighting to the last.”

“ I cannot approve this costume for la Signora Carrara : Amazons are out of keeping in a fête. Now, I much prefer the one to the left.”

They passed on to the picture which he named ; singular enough, there was a resemblance in the features, and yet no likeness between the two.

it was as if to shew the infinite difference that could be wrought by expression. The background of the painting was a crimson velvet curtain, which threw out the drapery of the figure. It was dressed in white satin, unmixed with any colour ; the boddice was laced with pearls, but the fair neck and arms wore no ornament ; and the profusion of raven black hair hung down in large loose curls, without any visible confinement. The large, soft dark eyes were raised, but seemed rather engrossed by their own feelings—(thoughts are scarcely tender enough for such a look)—than fixed upon any surrounding object.

“ It is a lovely portrait ; Francesca will, of course, adopt a dress honoured by your Grace’s approval.”

Louis looked at Francesca, who, colouring a little, bent her head in silence.

“ I have lately,” remarked Mazarin, “ added to my collection of royal likenesses ; this is a very scarce one of Francis the First.”

“ I am proud of my ancestor,” exclaimed Louis, gazing on it with an animation which suspended every thing else for the moment ; “ I envy the glory which yet lingers round the name of France’s most chivalrous king. Ah ! but for my mother’s fearful love, I should now be at the

head of my army. I envy Turenne every victory he gains in my cause."

"It is a grave fault," answered the Cardinal, "for a King thus rashly to expose his life. Think of all the evils France has suffered from the imprudent valour of her monarch."

"Imprudent, if you please," rejoined Louis; "but this very imprudence has ranked him among our greatest heroes." And saying this, he passed on, as if unwilling to continue the conversation.

"Ay," exclaimed Mazarin, looking after him with an expression of almost affection, "he has in him stuff enough for four kings, and an honest man beside."

A landscape, with a palace in the distance, somewhat resembling that of La Franchini's, attracted Francesca; and while she was observing a scene which seemed so familiar to her, she dropped the flowers which Evelyn had given her. Before she even perceived her loss, the King had picked them up, and was about to give them to her, when he perceived the note, and also observed that the seal was yet unbroken.

"Mademoiselle has not had time to read a letter so surrounded by sweets—pray, use no ceremony."

“ Good Heaven !” exclaimed Francesca,—“ if I had lost it !”

“ Is it, then, so very precious ?” asked Louis.

Francesca was too young not to feel ashamed of its being supposed that she could be the possessor of a love-letter, and answered unguardedly, “ Oh, I am only its bearer ; it is not for me.”

“ Can I save you the trouble ?” asked the King, smiling ; partly from that general gallantry, which was his universal tone, and a little, it must be owned, from curiosity.

“ Holy Madonna !” ejaculated Francesca ; “ if your Majesty would but take charge of it ! I see clearly that it is impossible I shall be able to deliver it.”

Louis, amused by the ignorance of form which so readily took him at his word, assured her he would give it. “ But to whom ? for the note has no address !”

“ To the English Queen.”

“ Louis looked surprised ; but having promised, his courtesy was too perfect to allow of either hesitation or question.

Further conversation was interrupted by the approach of the Cardinal and his niece, who asked the King to adjourn to a neighbouring gal-

lery, “Where,” said he, “you will witness the perfect enthusiasm of my gallantry.”

They went forward; but Madame de Mercœur lingered a moment behind. “I do not know how you will manage your hair,” said she, looking at the picture; “though, Heaven knows! we found it easy enough some three or four years ago.”

“I like the other best,” answered Francesca, who had a sort of unconscious reluctance to allow her costume to be thus Louis’s especial choice.

“That is quite out of the question,” rejoined the Duchesse; “have you not lived here long enough to know, that a royal wish is a command?”

They then proceeded towards the gallery, which they found already partially filled, and the news of its contents soon attracted thither the rest of the company. It contained every species of ornament: toys, china, shawls, lace, &c.—a very fair, whose temptations were selected with all possible attention to taste, and an equal disregard to expense. On one table were Indian cabinets, wrought in ivory, ebony, tortoise-shell, and amber; on another were the exquisite porcelain of Dresden and Sèvres; a third was heaped with gold and silver stuffs; a fourth, with the colours of the rainbow, in embroidered taffetas; close beside were perfumed gloves, and the rich ribands of

Lyons, and velvets from Genoa fit for the mantle of a Queen.

Other stands were covered with the “cunning devices” of the goldsmith and the jeweller. There were diamonds colourless with excess of light; rubies, rich as the sunset of their native clime; the purple amethyst; the pale, pure pearl; and ornaments worked in gold,—from the massive links, like precious fetters, to the light fragile chains of Venice. Nor were there only articles of personal decoration; but on some of the tables stood silver cups and lamps, crystal girandoles, and alabaster vases.

The surprise excited by this exhibition was indeed increased when the Cardinal came forward and said, that he trusted his guests would accept his offering, as whatever the gallery contained was to be distributed among them by means of a lottery. “It is fortune you will have to thank, not me.”

A murmur of applause and gratitude arose from the crowd, which was soon interrupted by the preparations for distributing the tickets.

Four pages, clothed in white and crimson, brought in two massive salvers, whose delicate carving was from the unrivalled graver of Benvenuto Cellini. These were filled with small sealed billets, from which the company were to draw,

and afterwards open, in succession. The pages first approached and knelt before the Queens, who each took one of the billets, and then proceeded to distribute the remainder among the rest.

It was curious to observe the many indications of character called forth by the spirit of gambling so unexpectedly evoked. Some pressed forward ; others hung back, as if they feared to tempt their fate without some effort at propitiation, in the way of “ muttered vow and inward prayer.” While one would take up the sealed billet with affected carelessness — belied, however, by the anxious eye — another could not conceal the flushed cheek and the trembling hand. Many elbowed their way to the pages, without consideration or scruple ; some few, with innate courtesy, made way, and seemed to think that others had as much right as themselves.

But Francesca’s whole attention was soon engrossed ; for, attracted by the beauty of some vases of cut crystal, Queen Henriette was standing beside one of the tables. A moment afterwards, Louis approached her, and began, apparently, to discuss with her their exquisite workmanship. He passed one or two from his own hand to her’s ; but scarcely five minutes had elapsed, before he turned away ; yet Francesca could not doubt but

that the letter had been delivered. The young Italian could scarcely believe, that what had seemed to her a difficulty so insuperable could be so easily effected. Her eyes were fixed upon the place, aware of what was going on, but she had not been able to perceive look or gesture that either party wished unobserved. She little knew the perfect command of countenance so early acquired in society ; or how one who, like Henriette, had lived in a world of plot, intrigue, and anxiety, was alive almost by intuition to the slightest signal of intelligence.

The King moved carelessly amid the surrounding groups, evidently, however, verging to her side of the room ; when his progress was interrupted by Mademoiselle Mancini, who addressed to him some laughing question. This was soon followed by another, and she contrived completely to engross Louis's notice. Marie even then began the course which, in after-years, secured her so vast an influence in the court,— alternately taking up and laying down her claim to the youthful monarch's penchant ; administering to his amusement, and ready to encourage his passing fancies. Already she had controlled her temper, excepting where it might be indulged in safety. She saw that Francesca was now the idol ; and artfully

turning the discourse on Italy, contrived to talk about her former friend — the most interesting subject she could have selected. Any one possessed of less finesse would have disparaged a rival,—not so Marie. She praised Francesca ; told many slight but amusing anecdotes of her childhood, and all in her favour ; till the King was charmed with her for such warm and ingenuous friendship, and with himself for having been the first to discover those merits and graces.

In the mean time, Francesca, separated from Madame de Mercœur, was hidden by a group around the Queen of Sweden. With the wall on one side, and a human blockade on the other, she was left at full leisure to meditate on a vow made at the first announcement of the lottery, namely, that whatever might fall to her lot she would offer in a neighbouring chapel to the Virgin, at whose shrine she would kneel one hour for Guido's safe return. But conversation was too busy to allow of any very abstracted meditation, and she was compelled, perforce, to listen.

“ I shall carry away with me,” said Christina, “ an equally brilliant and grateful remembrance of your court.”

“ I trust,” said the Duke de Candale, “ you

will defer these pleasures of memory to the latest possible period of enjoyment."

"Till to-morrow," replied she.

"So soon!" replied the Duke; "and can you tell us so with a smile?"

"Ah! you, I know, are one of those," continued Christina, "who imagine existence is bounded by Paris—that life elsewhere is but dull vegetation! Now, denounce me not as a heretic; but I prefer Rome. Here, every thing is absorbed in the present, as all there is merged in the past. Yet, you must admit, that the past, with its gathered glories of many ages, exceeds the past which has only to-day?"

"Yes," replied Candale; "but such glory has its gloom. The shadow of the tombs whence it emanates rests upon it."

"But what superb repose!—what deep conviction of the worth in life's nobler uses! I have," said the Queen, "higher hopes, and more generous feelings, in those marble solitudes, sacred to great names, than I have here, where pleasure is business, and a *tabouret* the best ambition. It is very catching; I am half inclined to dispute precedence myself."

"Yet, these forms are necessary," replied an elderly courtier, whose well-powdered *ailes de*

pigeon stood out a little more stiffly than usual at hearing such doctrines.

“ Well, well,” interrupted the Queen, impatiently; “ you take good care to surround yourself with them.”

“ I’ll tell you an anecdote,” said De Joinville. “ You are aware that the privilege of entrance to the staircase of the Louvre is reserved to the Princes, to Ambassadors, and to Dukes. One evening, when we were all assembled after his Majesty’s supper, M. De Roquelaure entered, and advancing at once to the King, said, ‘ I came in my carriage to the bottom of the staircase.’ Now he is not entitled to this honour, and the King is severe on any breach of etiquette; so he was asked, in an angry tone of voice, ‘ And who could be ignorant enough to allow you to enter?’ ‘ Ignorant, indeed, Sire,’ replied Roquelaure; ‘ for he allowed me to pass under the name of the Duc d’Epernon, the last deceased.’ Louis laughed at this; and we all, as in duty bound, followed the example. ‘ I must tell you how it happened,’ continued Roquelaure. ‘ It was raining in torrents when I arrived at the Louvre, and I told my coachman to enter. The sentinel called out, ‘ Who is it?’ ‘ It is a Duke.’ ‘ What Duke?’ ‘ The Duke d’Epernon.’ ‘ Which?’

‘The last deceased.’ ‘Enter!’ and my ghostly grace entered.’ So, you see, Madame, wit makes its way in spite of all our forms.”

The conversation was interrupted by an announcement, that as the billets had all been distributed, they were now to be opened.

Poor Francesca felt most cruelly disappointed. Pushed aside in the crowd, with none to heed her hidden position, no billet had been handed to her: the pages had passed to and fro, but she had been kept completely out of sight. She thought of her intended offering to the Madonna; it was as if her very intention had been rejected. Perhaps, even at that moment, Guido was in trouble or sickness! “Though I shall have nothing to offer, yet I will go to-morrow and pray,” thought she; and, in spite of her efforts, her eyes filled with tears.

The whole gallery was now a scene of gay confusion,—all were exhibiting and comparing their prizes; and in the mouvement Francesca contrived to draw near to Madame de Mercœur. She held in her hand a superb jasmine spray of pearls, which she was shewing to the group around:

“I pray you look at mine,” said a cavalier, who, though rather advanced beyond middle age, retained the buoyant step and clear glad eye of

youth ; “ do you not think it very appropriate ? ” and he exhibited a small hermitage, carved in alabaster.

“ Quite a moral lesson, Benserade, for you. When do you retire ? ”

“ A hermitage ? Benserade would prefer a monastery, if all tales be true,” exclaimed De Joinville ; “ and, in their confirmation, I must say I never tasted such venison as at the Benedictine Abbey.”

“ And I,” said the Duc de Candale, “ add my testimony in favour of their wines : summer seemed to have been expressly made for their vineyards. No trifling recommendations, Monsieur Benserade.”

“ I have known, in my court experience, much worse ones attended to,” replied Benserade.

“ Your hermitage wants nothing but an inscription,” said Madame de Mercœur.

“ It shall want nothing that you wish,” answered the poet ; and, taking up a pencil, wrote four lines on the vacant space which seemed destined for such use.

“ Adieu, fortune, honneurs, vous et les vôtres,
Je viens ici vous oublier ;
Adieu, toi-même amour, bien plus que tous les autres
Difficile à congédier.”

The little circle were warm in their commendations on the readiness and the grace of the inscription ; when the English Queen stopped for an instant in passing, and addressed Madame de Mercœur. “ Have I calculated too much on your kindness ? I want my Henriette to see some of the dresses preparing for the ballet ; will you allow her to come to-morrow, and trespass on your time and good-nature for their exhibition ? ” and as she spoke, her eye, with the most seeming unconsciousness, rested on Francesca. Madame de Mercœur returned a polite consent, and the Queen left the gallery.

Francesca was again confounded at the ease with which the appointment was made ; for she was right in her supposition, that the Princess’s visit the following morning was to give an answer to the note which had that evening been conveyed to her mother.

Mademoiselle Mancini, whose dialogue with Louis had been interrupted by the Queen’s departure, whom her son almost invariably himself conducted to her carriage, now advanced to exhibit a splendid pair of diamond earrings. She was herself radiant with triumph ; which grew still more obvious, when Louis returning joined their circle. Francesca was still in the back-

ground ; but the quick eye of the King at once perceived her. He produced his prize : it was a massive bracelet, consisting of a broad band of gold, widest in the middle, and shaped something like a cuff ; though it was obvious, from its unusually small size, it was only fitted to a most delicate wrist. It was set with a sort of running pattern of various precious stones ; and it was difficult to say, whether the costliness of the material or the taste of the workmanship was most to be admired.

Many a bright eye grew brighter as the glittering toy was submitted to their inspection ; but Louis seemed to have no immediate intention of parting with the beautiful bracelet. He passed round the circle, addressing each individual with his own peculiar grace of manner, questioning them on the various results of the lottery, till he arrived where Francesca stood. “ And you, Signora Carrara, have you been very successful ? — what memorial of our Cardinal’s gallantry has fallen to the lot of his fair country-woman ? ”

“ I had no billet,” was the hesitating and confused reply.

“ Mon Dieu ! why did you not take one ? ” exclaimed Madame de Mercœur. “ My dear Francesca, you are too shy.”

“ The pages did not happen to pass near me.”

“ And you, my poor child, were ashamed to help yourself! Will you ever forgive my carelessness? —It is I that am to blame,” said the Duchesse, with a kindness that quite deprived her young companion of all power to thank her.

“ Allow me the pleasure of reparation,” said the King. “ The Signora Carrara will, I hope, accept this toy in token that she extends her forgiveness to us all. There is not a gentleman here but must feel such a neglect as a personal reproach.” With the most dignified, yet graceful courtesy, Louis fastened the bracelet on Francesca’s arm.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ That early love that longest haunts the heart,
Bringing back youth and home ! ”

THE glittering bracelet, every precious stone on its golden circle lighted with the morning sunshine, was the first thing that caught Francesca's sight when she awoke. Up she sprang; for at once the remembrance of its destination flashed upon her mind. She dressed hastily, as she wished to be at home again before Madame de Mercœur had risen.

Once she fastened the beautiful toy on her arm in a passing touch of feminine vanity, equally momentary and pardonable; but not for an instant did she think of appropriating it to her own gratification. Her education, it is true, had preserved her from much of the ignorant belief of her country; but, whatever the head may be, the heart is always superstitious. The more unexpected the

arrival of the prize, the more it seemed given for the fulfilment of her original purpose. Indeed, so paramount was Guido in her thoughts, that it may be questioned whether it had even the merit of a sacrifice.

Closely drawing her cardinal round her, she descended into the park, at whose extremity was the little chapel where she intended to make her offering. She soon arrived there, and found the aged priest in attendance. The gem was given, and a blessing received ; and many and fervent were the prayers which she uttered at the foot of the altar, for the safety and the welfare of her beloved brother. She returned homewards more slowly ; for the lovely morning was so bright, and so quiet, that a sense of enjoyment and security unconsciously stole into her heart. The glorious sunshine, the clear blue heaven, somewhat reminded her of Italy. She felt the gladdening influences, and walked slowly on in one of those pleasant reveries which so rarely last beyond our childhood ; and when by chance they do revive, they bring with them the freshness of that early and happy time.

The path which she pursued overlooked the high road, and, though little exposed to view, it commanded all that was passing. Suddenly, she

saw Evelyn advancing slowly along, quite alone, and seemingly lost in deep meditation. Francesca was on the very point of beckoning to him, when she checked herself; she had already learned that leading lesson of society, namely, that of curbing your first impulses. She was unwilling to have it said that her early rising had been to meet him; and still more unwilling, when she recalled his wish to avoid any suspicion of his intercourse with the English Queen,—it was impossible to say how it might be excited, and she therefore resolved to pass on, without communicating the successful delivery of the letter. But, as he came nearer, she was startled to perceive his pale and haggard appearance. His dress was neglected, like one who had watched through the night, and cared not for the coming daylight. His lip and cheek were white; and his step was uncertain and agitated.

Every kind feeling in Francesca's heart rose to the surface; and she was just about to lean forward and speak, when a servant on horseback, leading another horse, rode up. Evelyn snatched the bridle hastily, flung himself on the steed, which pranced as if as impatient as himself, plunged the spurs in its side, and darted off like a man who strives to fly even from his very thoughts; while

Francesca watched the rapidly receding figure in mute amazement.

There is something peculiarly attractive to a woman in any display of strong emotion, though she has herself no part in it. Evelyn's pale countenance and disturbed manner awakened in Francesca the most tender interest. Involuntarily, she recurred to the period of their earliest acquaintance—their first meeting, when each felt attracted to the other, they knew not wherefore ; how shyness deepened into timidity, and how that gradually melted away before the sweet confidence of mutual affection. She remembered, how, one long summer day, they had, together with Guido, wandered amid the ruins of ancient Rome ; and how, while Guido dwelt on the poetry of the present, Evelyn rather turned to the history of the past,—and with what a noble enthusiasm ! How many true and generous feelings had found an unconscious vent in words ! “ Beloved Evelyn,” exclaimed she ; “ I am infected with the worldly atmosphere around. I do you less than justice, because necessity forces you to conform to the false and frivolous spirit, which here seems the very soul of existence,—I forget what your higher nature really is ; rather ought I to blame my own judgment, which looks not behind the mask.”

Francesca pursued her way, calling up every better attribute of her lover with all the aids which imagination is ever so ready to offer on such occasions, and, like most generous tempers, exaggerating the right to efface the wrong.

On her return, she hastened to Madame de Mercœur's apartment, who was already risen.

"Do not hate me," said the Duchesse, "for my news; but a new commission of my uncle's has taken your brother on to Rome."

"Ah! he will visit our old home," exclaimed Francesca, her eyes filling with tears.

"Why is it," asked Madame de Mercœur, "that you turn with a more tender feeling than I can to your former home, and former life? I candidly confess, that they never come into my head,—at least, of their own accord. But, do you know, I deem it one of my faults to live as much as I do in the present. I never think of what I do not see; unless, as you must bear me witness, an old friend now and then," passing her arm affectionately round Francesca.

Just then a page announced, that the Princess Henriette of England desired to be admitted.

"Ah," cried Madame de Mercœur, "there is another instance of my forgetfulness. I promised the dear child to shew her the caskets of that

curiously wrought tortoise-shell—a gift of my uncle's; and she is forced to recall my promise by a visit."

There was something singularly interesting in the youthful Princess, who now entered. Her figure was very childish, and so were her small and delicate features;—not so their expression; for there was a degree of thought, mournful in one so young; and her large blue eyes had that melancholy which is almost always prophetic. It was strange, that while gazing on that fair child, images of misfortune, early death, and all life's saddest accidents, rose uppermost in the mind;—it was like spring with the association of autumn.

Henriette approached, and, with a remarkably sweet voice, addressed Madame de Mercœur,—blushing, as it were, at the sound of her own voice; “ You see, Madame, what it is to promise a pleasure;—am I too bold in reminding you of your caskets? Remember, if I intrude, the fault began in your own kindness.”

Madame de Mercœur was all delight and courtesy, and the caskets were immediately produced. “ I must make a merit of a fault,” added she, “ and hope my candour will excuse my forgetfulness. It is curious, that just as your high-

ness entered, I was lamenting my utter want of memory."

"I am glad," replied Henriette, "that in future I shall have your example to plead. Indeed, I never remember any thing but kindness." And Francesca was conscious that the glance which she caught was directed towards her ; their eyes met, and the Princess withdrew her's with a smile, which said, "we understand each other."

No person is much in any particular room without having a favourite seat in it ; and Francesca was in the large window. Here she was a little withdrawn from the circle, and yet able both to see and hear ; timidity and curiosity being each satisfied.

The progress of Madame de Mercoeur's toilette went on ; and while her woman was exhausting her ingenuity and attention in arranging the front hair, Henriette exclaimed, "Ah, how beautiful the veins of the tortoise-shell are, with the light coming through, just like painted glass ;" and raising one in her hand, she approached the window. Francesca, of course, offered to hold it ; and while thus employed, the Princess said, in the lowest possible tone, "Tell Mr. Evelyn, his note was just in time ;" and then added, in a higher

tone, “ I really must thank the Signora Carrara ; she holds the box so that the light comes through quite beautifully ! ” and turned away with another of her sweet and intelligent smiles. The carriage, with the lady in waiting, being announced, Henriette departed, leaving Madame de Mercœur charmed with her grace, and her admiration of the favourite caskets.

But though Francesca strove to repress the idea, as harsh and unkind, she could not repress the feeling, that this grace was but the perfection of art. How must the natural emotions have been checked—the wild, warm impulses of childhood subdued ; how much of dissimulation taught as a study, before a child could be so guarded, and so ready in resource ! “ ‘Tis a weary apprenticeship to serve,” thought she ; “ and, after all, is not this perfection of manner a thing rather to be admired than loved ?—love asks reality.”

Visitor after visitor filled up the morning ; and late in the day, to Francesca’s utter astonishment, Evelyn was among the number, looking equally well in health and gay in spirits. He came into the room accompanied by the Chevalier De Joinville ; and they were discussing, with much animation, whether blue and amber, or green and scarlet, were the best mixture of colours.

“ Give me scarlet and green,” said the Chevalier De Joinville; “ they are magnificently barbaric. The one so warlike; the other so sacred to all true believers. Why, I should feel like the Sublime Porte himself.”

“ Give me,” replied Evelyn, “ blue —

‘ The sunny azure in my lady’s eye,’
and amber —

‘ The amber tresses of her dropping hair.’

I appeal to Madame de Mercoeur —”

“ Who gives it in your favour, were it but for the gallantry which brings but feminine instances to support its taste. Out on the Chevalier’s barbarous references.”

“ Theory and practice do not always accord,” observed De Joinville, as he watched Evelyn take a seat beside Francesca.

“ I am impatient,” exclaimed she, “ to tell you about your note;” and she proceeded to detail her anxieties and safe accomplishment of her undertaking. “ I was very near stopping you this morning; but tell me,” and her voice took an unusual tone of interest, “ what had just affected you so seriously?”

Evelyn absolutely coloured to the forehead as he asked, in a hesitating voice, where she had seen him.

“ As you mounted in the high road this morning, and spurred that unfortunate horse of yours as if life and death had been in his speed.”

“ I cannot allow myself to be cross questioned,” replied Evelyn, with a smile obviously forced.

Francesca felt her interest flung back again ; — nothing is more painful, than to have a kindly anxiety treated as curiosity. Involuntarily, her manner became constrained ; and the conversation, which had begun with so much animation, died away into an awkward silence, which Evelyn was the first to break.

“ I have heard nothing talked of this morning,” said he, “ but the King’s gallantry and your beautiful bracelet. Do shew it to me.”

“ I offered it this morning to the Madonna. It was in returning from the chapel through the park that I saw you.”

“ You have made an offering of your bracelet ! What could tempt you to do any thing half so absurd ? Were you afraid it would haunt you with too brilliant hopes ? ”

"I pray you," returned Francesca coldly, "not to make my belief a subject of ridicule."

"But I must know what deep sin it was intended to expiate."

"None," replied Francesca; "it only accompanied my prayers for my brother's safety—"

"As if," continued he, "his safety were endangered by that pretty arm being worthily clasped."

"At all events," replied Francesca, "it could not be better bestowed, than as an offering, however unworthy, for his sake who is nearest and dearest to me in the world."

"I thank you for the implied compliment," returned Evelyn, in a tone of pique. But all further intercourse was suspended, by Madame de Mercœur's rising, as it was near the hour of her attendance upon the Queen.

Again Francesca felt dispirited, and discontented. "It is in vain," thought she, "to deceive myself: there is, there can be, no sympathy between us. He excludes me from his confidence—he takes no interest in my feelings. Ah! I see now that love is the delusion which the sage and the grave say it is. Perhaps I should be thankful that my eyes have so soon been opened to its vanity." Yet she did not feel very grateful. 'Tis

pity for those whose standard of love is high and ideal ; for them are prepared the downfal and the disappointment. The heart is the true sensitive plant—revolting at a touch.

CHAPTER XXIV.

—“The comic triumphs and the spoils
Of sly Derision—still on every side
Hurling the random bolts.”

AKENSIDE.

FRANCESCA would have been not a little astonished could she have known with what curiosity her arrival was anticipated that night in the royal circle. Already the history of the bracelet had reached the Queen's ear, with every possible variation and addition that human ingenuity, heightened by human envy, could devise. Perhaps of these Marie's version was the most covertly bitter; and poor Francesca appeared with a degree of artifice and coquetry about as far removed from her real nature as it was from the real case. But Anne of Austria, like most in her station, had singular tact in detecting the true and the false. The ear long accustomed to, and therefore on its guard against, dissimulation, often catches the fact from slight indications which would pass unnoticed by the common observer. Still, she too

had some desire to note what effect the present honour, and still more brilliant fancies, would produce on a character whose simplicity and nature she had discerned at a glance. The truth was, that Francesca was perfectly fancy free ; she saw nothing in the King's action but the most genuine kindness ; she was very grateful, and there, to her thought, the matter ended.

When they entered the royal apartment, Louis was at one end, entirely engrossed by Mademoiselle Mancini, while the Queen and her immediate circle, which they joined, was at the other. Marie had completely changed her plan ; she saw that the higher game was not in her hands ; the King was not, and would not, be in love with her ; but she amused him, and, by a little skilful management and flattery, could contrive to occupy his attention quite enough to alarm his mother ; " And I shall be brilliantly married," thought she, " by way of security." It may be questioned whether Guido ever even entered her head ; love never lasts with a temper like hers ; a first lover was welcome rather as an omen of future triumph than for his own sake. The sentiment of such a heart is dew, that exhales with the earliest sunbeam.

The group round Anne were busily employed in dissecting the Swedish Queen, who had departed

that morning, her *éclat* a little tarnished by an overlong visit, and by an indiscreet patronage of Marie Mancini's fascinations. An idol must be picked to pieces before it is discovered to be but wood and stone. An affected inattention, and a grave smile from the Queen, reassured De Joinville as to the success of his mimicry, and Francesca was certainly the only one who stood perfectly dismayed at the sudden change from flattery to sarcasm. So eagerly was the discourse carried on, that not one perceived the Queen, who was moving round, drop her glove; it fell close to Francesca, who, drawing off her own, picked it up, and presented it. In so doing, Anne's quick eye discovered that she had no bracelet on; like all artful people, she suspected artifice, and immediately supposed that Francesca feared to wear the gem in her presence.

"My beautiful simplicity has then," thought the Queen, "deeper designs than I suspected, and is unwilling to let me see aught that can excite suspicion." "How is this," continued she aloud, "that the Signora Carrara does not honour my son by wearing his gift?"

Francesca was dismayed; this was a difficulty which she had not foreseen. Even the consciousness of right does not always support us; and to

increase her consternation, Louis had joined the circle, while the eyes of every one were turned upon her. Colouring till the tears glistened on her long dark lashes, in a low faltering whisper she stammered, “ I have it not.”

“ Have you lost it?” demanded the Queen.

“ No, madame.”

“ Then why did you not wear it to-night?”

“ It is mine no longer,” replied the young Italian.

“ Surely,” rejoined Anne, who was already offended that such a gift should have been lightly held, “ you cannot have given it to any friend?”

“ O no!” was the eager answer.

“ Then what have you done with it?”

“ I offered it at the shrine of Our Lady, in the chapel of the Valley.”

“ Now, the blessed Virgin forbid I should grudge aught to her altar,” exclaimed Louis, with evident displeasure, “ but, methinks, the piety was ill-timed.”

“ Who knows,” observed Mademoiselle Mancini with a sneer, “ what idea la Signora might attach to the gift; perhaps it needed a little expiation.”

“ We cannot tell for what tender interests it was to plead,” added the Chevalier de Joinville.

With a cold and indifferent air the Queen turned away, when Francesca, regardless of form in the excitement of the moment, sank on her knee before her. “ I cannot endure this imputation of being thankless for kindness so gracious and so precious. Madame, I have an only and beloved brother, delicate from infancy, and parted from me for the first time in our life—parted from me on a long and dangerous journey. When the lottery commenced yesterday evening, I vowed within my heart, that whatever became mine should be offered to the Madonna, with my earnest prayers for his safety. I felt almost, in having nothing to offer, that my tribute had been, as it were, rejected ; and when, by the most unexpected chance, the beautiful bracelet became mine, could I, dared I, not fulfil my precious vow ? Was I the less grateful, because I put the gift to its most worthy use ?”

There was not one kindly feeling in the Queen but what was touched by the youthful stranger’s narrative ; she raised her, saying, “ And so, my poor child, you thought we were angry—the blessed Virgin forbid ! We could wish her shrine as well served by others young as yourself.”

Look and word at once changed all round, and not a few found themselves growing most

suddenly devout. Just then, an attendant to whom the Queen had whispered returned ; and taking a small case from her hand, Anne produced a bracelet somewhat similar to the very one with which Francesca had parted, excepting that it had her cipher, surrounded by a wreath of fleurs-de-lis. " Louis, will you offer this to Mademoiselle Carrara ? "

The young King again fastened the clasp on Francesca's arm. " I hope you have no more vows to pay ? " said he, smiling.

Francesca could not have spoken, had it been to save her life ; but there are cases in which silence is very eloquence.

" My dearest child," exclaimed Madame de Mercœur, " how I enjoyed your triumph ! But do, pray, remember that royal gifts are meant to be kept. I must say, however, that the Madonna stood your friend to-night ; and I am sure you deserved it."

Triumph it might be—it certainly was ; but Francesca enjoyed it not as such. Injustice is so revolting to the young—they hear of it, they think of it, they believe in its existence, but always as of that which cannot affect themselves. It is a bitter lesson that which first brings it home. Many a moment of feverish unrest did that night

bring to Francesca's pillow; she questioned, she blamed herself—what could she have done that the whole company appeared so to rejoice in her pain? Why should they dislike her—what offence could she have given? With what increased gratitude did she turn to the Queen's kindness! It would have yielded her small pleasure, could she have known that, beyond the momentary impulse, that kindness was, of all, the most deceitful.

No marvel that we regret our youth. Let its bloom, let its health, let its pleasures depart, could they but leave behind the singleness and the innocence of the happy and the trusting heart. The lessons of experience may open the eyes; but, as in the northern superstition, they only open to see dust and clay, where they once beheld the beauty of palaces.

CHAPTER XXV.

“ Nous avons changé tout cela.”

“ I MUST be early in my attendance on the Queen to-day, and you shall accompany me,” said Madame de Mercœur to Francesca. “ Mademoiselle de Montpensier, so long an exile from the court, has at last obtained permission to return; she will arrive this morning. Have you any curiosity to see this heroine of the Fronde?”

“ Indeed I have,” answered Francesca; “ my only fear is, in seeing so many new faces, that I shall forget from remembering too much. The whole of my former life would not fill one week of my present existence.”

“ I, too, recall,” replied the Duchesse, “ how bewildered I felt at first. I really lost half of what I wanted to observe, through fear of losing any. But we must be quick. I myself long to see if our Princess return with her former unbroken spirit. There is a saying of hers when a child,

which is the key to her whole character. Some one was talking to her of her grandmother, Madame de Guise, when she exclaimed, ‘ She is my grandmother at a distance—she is not Queen.’ ”

On Madame de Mercœur’s arrival at the palace she found the carriage and guards in waiting, the Queen having decided that she would do her niece the honour of going to meet her.

“ As we have deemed a reconciliation expedient,” said Anne to Madame de Mercœur, as they passed down the steps, “ we must do it with a good grace; a flourish of trumpets, and a few extra guards, are a ready way to Mademoiselle’s heart.”

The cortège proceeded about a mile, when a courier announced the Princess’s approach, who arrived almost as soon. The carriage, which was at full gallop, stopped suddenly; the guards deployed round, and Mademoiselle alighted. She advanced with the step of an empress, till she came beside the Queen, when, dropping on her knee, she kissed the hem of her robe, and then the royal hand. This, however, Anne would scarcely permit, and, raising the penitent, embraced her with seeming cordiality, exclaiming, “ I am very glad to see you; you know I was

always fond of you." The Princess again kissed her hands. " Not but what I have sometimes been very, very angry with you. I did not mind the Orleans business; but as to *la porte Saint Antoine*, well for you I was not near—I could have strangled you!"

" Ah, Madame!" was the reply, " I deserve it, since I displeased you; but it has been my misfortune to be connected with people who induced me to act contrary to my duty."

" I have said all I meant to say—it is as well to have it over at once. But henceforth it is a forbidden subject—one, indeed, quite forgotten; and I shall love you as well as ever." And again they embraced. " Though it is six years since I have seen you," exclaimed Anne, " you are not the least altered; instead of that, you are handsomer than ever; your being rather more *embon-point* suits you, and your complexion is brilliant to a degree."

" Has your Majesty," rejoined Mademoiselle, " heard that I have actually some gray hairs?"

" I am surprised," said Anne, " to see so many at your age."

" I was resolved," observed her companion, " that you should see me as I am, so have not worn powder." Then, as if unwilling to admit

them as a defect, she added, " But my mother had them before she was twenty ; and gray hairs are quite an heir-loom on my father's side."

When they reached the gates, the Queen desired her to notice the guard. " It is doubled to-day on your account ; we have not so many usually."

" Nay," exclaimed the guest, " this is treating me like a foreign princess."

" Only in honour, not in affection," was the gracious answer.

On their arrival, Francesca could not resist an opportunity of expressing her astonishment to Madame de Mercœur. " I expected," whispered she, " the interview would be attended with such awkwardness, and made myself quite uncomfortable before with thinking how annoying it would be to both parties. Instead of that, nothing could be easier ; and they seemed so glad to meet. But were they quite in earnest ?"

" My dear Francesca," said the Duchesse, laughing, " there are some questions that were never meant to be asked, still less to be answered ; and yours is one of the number."

They were all now assembled in the Queen's apartment, who, passing her fingers through Mademoiselle's hair, said, " It is very beautiful,

but I must see it better dressed." The conversation then took the most familiar turn ; and Francesca, from where she stood, could hear the Queen giving a laughing account of the Duc de Domville's attachment to Mademoiselle Menneville, the prettiest of her maids of honour, all of whom were pretty.

" It is a passion of the good old time, and has already lasted some four years ; but Madame la Duchesse de Vantadour, his mother, will not hear of it. Never before was a lover of fifty so put out, to think that he cannot yet have his own way. Not content with his own cares, when obliged to be absent he leaves his almoner to take charge of her. It is gallantry equally antediluvian and interminable ; I suppose they will be married one day, and buried the next."

At this moment the King arrived. He had been riding, and was covered with dust ; but that was, as his mother observed, the more flattering, for it marked his impatience to see their visitor. On his entrance the Queen presented Mademoiselle. " Here is a young lady who is very sorry that she has been so wicked, and promises to be very good in future." The King laughed. " But where is your brother ?"

" He is coming in the carriage ; he would not

spoil his dress by riding. He is adorned to distraction."

And he began laughing again, while Mademoiselle betrayed the conviction that she was herself the object of this decoration; but instantly assuming an air of the utmost humility, she exclaimed, "I ought to kneel to implore your Majesty's pardon for my past offences."

"Nay," replied he, "it is I who must kneel to you, to entreat you not to speak in such a style."

"How like she is to your brother!" said Anne.

"My brother is much flattered by the discovery," said her son; while Mademoiselle wore a pleased and conscious smile.

"My life for it," whispered the Chevalier de Joinville, "that Mademoiselle is already calculating the probabilities of marrying Monsieur."

At last the Duke of Anjou arrived, dressed, as his brother said, to distraction. He wore a garb rather fanciful, of a silver-gray colour, trimmed with crimson, and a narrow edging of silver; the lace round his throat was of the finest point; and, some time before he was seen, his perfumes announced his approach. The youthful prince was just at the age when love of dress is a passion. The first appreciation of one's own face and figure

is a very delightful feeling ; and as the youth outgrows the boy, it seems as if so much lost time had to be made up. The Duke embraced his cousin with extreme cordiality, which was greatly increased by her ready compliments on his growth and appearance.

A few minutes afterwards the Cardinal was announced ; and Francesca was not the only one who was curious to observe the meeting. They had been such declared, such personal enemies, that, even in a court, it seemed wonderful how a decent external could be given to their reconciliation. The difficulty was, however, only imaginary. Mademoiselle was the first to salute the Cardinal, who returned it with an air of great *empressement* ; then addressing the Queen, she said, “ Really, I do think, your Majesty, after all that has passed, should bid us embrace ; I am sure, on my part, it will be with all my heart.”

The Cardinal immediately approached, and knelt. This was, however, not suffered by the Princess, who, extending both hands, raised him, and they embraced with great apparent goodwill.

“ The times are changed,” said De Joinville, in a low tone to Francesca, “ since Mademoiselle promenaded the terraces of the Louvre, with her

fan ornamented with bunches of straw tied with blue riband, and half Paris shouting at the sight."

Francesca made no reply; Mademoiselle was so overflowing with happiness at her return to the court, that it was absolute cruelty to make an allusion to the dangerous past. Refinement and amusement, like knowledge, are so diffused now-a-days, that an exile from the royal circle would be a nominal punishment; but it then included every species of privation. The theatre—at that era such a resource—balls, fêtes, &c., to say nothing of worldly influence, were all forfeited by a banishment from court, the centre of all the pleasures, variety, and ambition of society.

"I look upon to-day, Mademoiselle," said the Cardinal, "as the reward of my anxiety for your return. I have, indeed, not been master of the obstacles which opposed it."

"I can assure you," replied the Princess, "you are but little aware how I used to take your part, when my father was most enraged against you. I always said things would be exactly as they are."

Memory has many conveniences, and, among others, that of foreseeing things as they have afterwards happened.

The dinner-hour being near, Mademoiselle

departed, Louis handing her to her carriage. Francesca could not but admire her noble demeanour, her easy yet stately walk, and the finely turned head, placed so gracefully on her shoulders ; certainly no one ever more completely looked her high descent.

“ The comedy has gone off to perfection,” exclaimed Madame de Mercœur. “ I am glad she is allowed to return ; she is no longer dangerous, and her exile has been sufficient punishment.”

“ Alas,” replied Francesca, “ I look upon the self-possession, the readiness of reply, the ease, I daily witness, with such hopelessness——”

“ All in good time,” answered her friend, laughing ; “ you are quite young enough to blush a little longer. Wait till you have a motive for dissimulation. I am afraid it is intuitive with us all.”

Truly, society is like a large piece of frozen water ; there are the rough places to be shunned, the very slippery ones all ready for a fall, and the holes which seem made expressly to drown you. All that can be done is to glide lightly over them. Skaiting well is the great art of social life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ Many falsehoods are told from interest, many from ill-nature, but from vanity most of all.”

THE return of the Duc de Mercœur added, if possible, to the gaiety of Compiègne; and the Duchesse gave a fête in its honour. Every thing then was expressed by a fête; saints were worshipped, mistresses flattered, ministers courted, victories celebrated, sentiments affiched—and all by a fête. Francesca greatly enjoyed the preparations—the pleasant part of a festival. For the truth of this, ask any young person you please. No entertainment, however brilliant, to which you merely go, can at all equal the delights of one where you have assisted from the original idea of the giving to the actual accomplishment of its being given. Your taste has been consulted, and your self-love enlisted in its cause; your advice has been asked, and, consequently, you have a personal interest in its success. Your time has

been taken up by a thousand details—and occupation is the life of time. Who shall deny that "*les avenues de la bonheur sont delicieuses à parcourir?*"

Francesca was somewhat shocked to find it was thought "*charmant*" that all the fountains for the occasion were to flow from dolphins' mouths, instead of from the classic urn of some marble naiad. Neither could she perceive the absolute necessity of fastening all the wreaths with blue and white ribands, the colours of the house of Mercœur. Moreover, she could not help thinking that the congratulatory verses were rather profuse in their Mars', Hercules', Alexanders, and Julius Cæsars. Still, these were ~~very~~ small matters—as nothing, beside the display of fireworks which were prepared, and the rose-coloured taffeta brocaded with silver which was to be her own dress.

The important night arrived; an unusually hot day had been succeeded by a cool fresh evening, with a slight wind just enough to stir the orange-flowers, till the air was redolent of their perfume. The gardens were illuminated, and a striking effect was produced by the large pieces of water, which spread like immense mirrors, filled with the light which they reflected.

Enjoyment is the least descriptive of all feel-

ings ; and Francesca, who by this time had formed many slight and pleasant acquaintances, no longer found that a crowd was such very dreary solitude. She passed from one gay companion to another, greeted with numberless slight flatteries, alike listening and forgetting with a smile ; honoured by a few words of compliment from Anne, and a look still more flattering from Louis, who at that moment found the homage which surrounded him on such a public occasion somewhat irksome, when a glance only could follow the lovely creature who flitted past.

I believe there are few who have not, even in their gladdest hours, felt how nearly gaiety and sadness are allied ; a shadow steals over the spirits, like a cloud over the moon, soft and subduing, perhaps transitory, but not the less dark for the moment.

It was with a sensation of relief that Francesca parted with her last companion, and glided away to a lonely spot in the garden. The lamps, the music, came softened from the distance ; the turf before her was silvered only by the moonlight. The moss at the foot of an old chestnut served her for a seat ; and a trellis-work covered with honeysuckle separated her from the adjacent walk, the arch opening into which was just beyond. She

sat, her beautiful head leaning upon her hand,—now listening to the sweet tones floating on the wind, and now lost in a vague and pensive reverie.

“ I know not,” thought she, “ why I should feel so sad—it seems the very wilfulness of a child ; and yet what an unutterable depression is upon me at this moment ! Why should there arise so vividly before me all that is most painful in my destiny — its uncertainty, its dependance, its emptiness ? How unsatisfactory has my life been of late ! I have been divided between petty mortifications, which I blushed to confess even to myself, and vain feverish amusements—for I cannot call them pleasures. I wish I could look beyond the smiling faces which meet me on every side, and see whether they conceal feelings like my own. Madaine Mercœur is happier than I am, and has more causes for happiness. She has so much kindness in her power—is so beloved, and so secure of that love ! Alas, I am so very, very grateful to her ; and yet I cannot help asking, what is my gratitude to her, and of what consequence is my affection ? Ah ! how foolish—nay, worse, is this repining ! It is as if I wished some misfortune to befall Henriette, merely to prove my attachment. Not so—but

surely I may contrast our situations without wishing hers to change."

And Francesca was drawing a contrast as contrasts are usually drawn, namely, as unfairly as possible. We take some most favourable portion of another's existence, and compare it with one of the darkest in our own, and then exclaim against the difference.

Gradually the young Italian's reverie became merged in one of the sweet Venetian barcarolles which had been familiar to her from infancy, when her attention was first attracted, and then fixed, by the conversation carried on by two individuals in the walk behind her, and whose voices she at once recognised to be those of the Chevalier de Joinville and Evelyn. There is not much to be said in defence of her overhearing; but is there a girl in the world who would not listen to her own name, and from the lips of her lover?—it must be so pleasant to hear him confirm to others what he has first said to yourself. Curiosity would be quite motive enough; but vanity and curiosity together are irresistible.

"What," asked the Chevalier, "will your beautiful Italian do?"

"Console herself," replied Evelyn. "To be very candid with you, I am getting heartily tired

of my connexion in that quarter. It was a very amusing *délassement* during her residence with that most amiable of artists, Bournonville; but now that some childish acquaintance with the Mancinis has induced them to try the dear delight of patronage, my beauty assumes *les grands airs*, and actually, the other day, gave a distant hint of marriage!"

"The forgetfulness of women is really charming," observed De Joinville.

"What say you to taking my place?—many a heart is caught in the rebound; and La Carrara's is worth having for a little while."

"I thank you," replied De Joinville; "but I have a foolish prejudice against *les belles délaissées*—I have no talents for consolation."

"Between ourselves, Francesca will find consolation in ambition. With her beauty and hypocrisy she may yet make a brilliant match. Well, I wish her all possible success; and, by the by, De Joinville, we really must keep her secret."

"Any secret of mine that you possess, you are at perfect liberty to reveal," said Francesca.

The sudden turn in the walk had brought the whole party face to face. For a moment the three stood in perfect silence. Evelyn—for falsehood brings its own cowardice—was speechless.

De Joinville watched the scene with curiosity—perhaps with deeper interest; for in his secret soul he disbelieved what his companion had just asserted. There was a perfect simplicity—a clear purity—a frankness—in Francesca's whole demeanour, that no art could have assumed—it was too natural to be adopted. Moreover, his attention was rivetted as if on an exquisite picture; the moonlight fell full on her face, which was pale as death, for her emotion was far too strong for confusion; her fine upper lip curled with unutterable scorn, while the blue veins on the temple rose distinct. The large dark eyes seemed filled with light, while her recreant lover cowered beneath their flashing disdain; and yet he was the first to speak.

“ My dearest Francesca must forgive what a moment's jealousy—”

“ I do indeed forgive,” exclaimed she, while a smile of the most entire contempt rested on her beautiful features, “ what I despise too much to resent! But as even the most cowardly liar may have his own miserable portion of influence, I owe a formal disavowal to myself.” Turning to De Joinville, she continued, “ As you have heard so much of this discourse, you may have patience for a moment more. My engagement with Mr.

Evelyn has been open and avowed — approved by my only friend, Madame de Mercœur, who, as a girl, was the confidante of an attachment whose origin she witnessed — why still unfulfilled, has been in consequence of my feeling that it was a duty we owed to Mr. Evelyn's father, not to marry without his consent. I pray your pardon for troubling you with what can so little interest a stranger; but every man must have some feminine tie near and dear to his heart; and for the sake of such, he owes somewhat of courtesy to all who bear the name of woman.—As for you, sir," again addressing Evelyn, "I must say, our parting will to me be only a relief. Your right has for some time been your only claim on affections that have long ceased to be yours. I felt your unworthiness before I knew it. My only sense at this moment is thankfulness." She turned away, and passed De Joinville with a slight bend, and in another instant was hidden by the trees.

"I must follow her," exclaimed Evelyn, "and even try a little flattery;" but De Joinville observed that he did not take the same path.

"*Ma foi!*" exclaimed the Chevalier, "he must try his flattery on himself."

CHAPTER XXVII.

“ ‘Tis a hard lesson for the heart to learn,
That it can give itself, but give in vain.”

FRANCESCA hurried through the winding paths that led unperceived to the château, and, once safe in the solitude of her own chamber, gave way to the choking tears she sought not to repress; and yet she felt it a relief to look back to the event of the past evening. She no longer reproached herself for the change of her feelings towards Evelyn—how completely was it justified! her growing dislike had been, as it were, a natural warning—the good revolting unconsciously from the bad. Then her cheek burned, and her brow darkened, when she recalled the imputation he had cast upon her; shame, in the first instance, had been merged in surprise and anger—shame can never be the first feeling of the innocent; but even the falsest accusation brings the burning and bitter blush, to think that such can even have

been imagined. To this was added deep humiliation ; for Francesca's worst mortification was to remember that she had loved him. How had her ingenuous and trusting affection been requited ! Deeply within her inmost soul Francesca felt that thus she could never love again.

It is no "romantic phantasy," no "eternal constancy," no "dying for love," no "blighted affection,"—phrases so strangely misunderstood, and still more strangely misapplied,—no vain dreaming sentiment, when I say, deeply is that woman to be pitied whose first attachment has been ill requited. The qualities most natural to youth are at once destroyed,—suspicion takes the place of confidence, reserve of reliance, distrust instead of that ready belief in all that was good and beautiful. Knowledge has come to her too soon—knowledge of evil, unqualified by the general charities which longer experience infallibly brings ; but her age has lent its own freshness to this first great emotion ; it becomes unconsciously a criterion, and the judgment is harsh, because the remembrance is bitter. Another affection may, and in nine cases out of ten does, supersede the first ; and it is well that it should,—the daily contentment of life, the household happiness of hourly duty and hourly love, are not to be offered up in vain

sacrifice to the unpitying past. But not the less at the time did the disappointment appear too heavy, not the less cruel was its influence over the mind; the ideal of love is gone for ever—its poetry a dream, its fairy-land a departed vision.

Francesca felt as if life had suddenly lost its interest; yet it was not the lover that she regretted, but the love. Never more could the future be one vague but delicious hope; never more could she turn away disbelieving from the tale of treachery and inconstancy; never more take refuge in the depths of her own imagination, and find comfort in her own belief of perfect love.

Her taper sinking in the socket, warned her how late, or rather how early, it was; for a shadowy light made the chamber dimly visible. She drew back the heavy curtain, and in came the bright sunshine, and the cool fresh air. Below lay the garden, where arches of gathered flowers drooped, discoloured and withered, beside the fresh growth on the natural bough. Most of the lamps were extinct, but they glittered golden in the morning light, and in some few a pale white flame yet struggled with day. As she left the window, the mirror opposite caught her eye—that mirror which she had left the evening before radiant with the graceful aids of dress. She started back

at the contrast; her hair was dishevelled, and pushed from the forehead in tangled masses, while the wreath added to the unseemliness by the contrast of finery; her face was wan, and the eyes red and heavy with watching, to say nothing of tears; while the parched lip had not a vestige of colour. Her dress, too, had lost its freshness; and its gaiety, the bare neck and arms, were strangely at variance with the broad daylight and quiet morning. The very first glance suggested the propriety of going to bed. Leaning for a few minutes at the open casement, she breathed the pure and sweet air, which at once revived and soothed her; then, closing the curtains, she retired to rest, and, thoroughly worn out, body and mind, was soon asleep.

There are few but must recollect the first awakening after any event; the unconscious rousing, the gradual remembrance that something unusual has occurred, the half reluctance to recall it, till suddenly it flashes full upon your mind, and you start up in astonishment at even your momentary oblivion. One part was indeed disagreeable to Francesca—the necessity which existed of telling Madame de Mercœur: not but what she was certain of the most affectionate sympathy; but it was painful to be the herald of

her own mortification, and the disgrace of him who, at least, had been her lover. Still the disclosure was inevitable—she would be obliged to explain the cessation of intercourse between Evelyn and herself; and even without that, she owed confidence to Madame de Mercoeur's kindness.

The account was received with more regret and surprise than she had expected ; the Duchesse could scarcely listen for her own exclamations—all the while begging Francesca to go on. Suddenly she started from her seat, for the Duke entered the room : passing her hand through his arm, she made him sit down in the fauteuil, while in the same breath she told Francesca to tell her story, and at the same time went on telling it for her, only interrupted by the angry or contemptuous ejaculations of her husband.

“ Mademoiselle da Carrara,” said he, when the narrative was ended, “ I never heard of a more gratuitous insult—of a more unmerited calumny ; allow me at least to say, that your friends feel that it is offered to themselves. But now let us dismiss so worthless a subject. We will find you a better cavalier in our *belle France*.” So saying, he rose to depart ; while a most painful suspicion, suggested by the sudden paleness of the Duchesse,

arose in Francesca's mind; and yet to give it words, should she be mistaken, would be cruelly embarrassing.

"It must not go unpunished," exclaimed the Duchesse, as if answering to her own thoughts. "Yes, mine is the best plan; I will instantly go to my uncle, and ask him for a *lettre de cachet*. Solitary imprisonment in the Bastile will be the very thing for Mr. Evelyn."

"I think," replied Francesca, "that to give me pain is the farthest in the world from your wishes; and yet what could be more painful to me than any thing like revenge on Mr. Evelyn?"

"Good Heavens!" interrupted Madame de Merceour, "you cannot retain one spark of affection for him?"

"Indeed I do not. I speak from motives of pure selfishness. I wish, now, nothing of or from Mr. Evelyn but forgetfulness. I disdain his miserable conduct too much to resent it; and the only proof my friends can give me of sympathy in my feelings, is to shew how unworthy they consider it to be of notice."

"Ah, but Francesca, a few months' solitary meditation would be of such infinite service to *le perfide*! it would bring him to his senses—per-

haps to your feet again ; and the pleasure of rejection would be something."

" To me less than nothing. No, dear Henriette, I never wish to see or hear of Mr. Evelyn again ; it is sufficient mortification to think that I ever could have loved him. Besides, may I add, that I have my own little vanity on the occasion, and its suggestions whisper perfect discretion. Confidence, entire confidence, I owed to your friendship ; but I am not bound to extend that confidence. A subject like the present must be annoying in the mouths of indifferent people ; their comments, whether of wonder or pity, would be intolerable. Any notice of Mr. Evelyn's conduct must excite them, and from such I do entreat to be spared."

" Rely upon me, that it shall not be talked of," replied the Duke. " And now, Henriette," addressing his wife, " do let us praise her. In such a case I should have expected tears, faintings, and a most ready acceptance of your kind offer of the Bastile."

" Now, see the selfishness !" exclaimed Madame de Mercoeur, laughing ; " he is charmed with you because you have given him no trouble—he has not had even to offer you a glass of water. But I do say you are a dear creature, and quite

worthy to be one of those much-enduring heroines of your line, on whose merits it so delighted your poor old grandfather to dwell."

"And when I remember," said Francesca, "the stiff red and blue figures he used to exhibit, the saints and my forefathers forgive me for saying, the blessed Virgin keep me from the resemblance!"

"But see what it is," cried the Duchesse, "to enact the part of confidante! I am actually forgetting, and you too, Francesca, the important duties of the toilette. Come, come—we must make haste; for in a little while I expect to be overwhelmed with congratulations on the success of my charming fête; and you must prepare for not a few compliments on your own appearance—and, indeed, I never saw you look better."

So saying, the little knot broke up; Francesca greatly relieved to think the disclosure was made.

The following evening was the one previous to their meditated return to Paris—a resolution somewhat suddenly taken, in consequence of the King's intention to visit Sedan, and inspect the proceedings of the army. Among the visitors who crowded in to express their regret that Compiègne, still so beautiful, was about to be deserted, was the Chevalier de Joinville. He took the earliest

opportunity of addressing Francesca—who, in spite of herself, could not help blushing as she saw him approach, partly, it must be owned, from apprehension. He had usually contrived to say or to imply something disagreeable—and now he had such an opening !

She was pleasantly mistaken. His manner was respectful, and even kind, as he said, “ I cannot depart for Sedan, without entreating Mademoiselle la Carrara’s forgiveness.”

“ A forgiveness most readily granted, did she know what there was to forgive.”

“ An unjust opinion. Is the offence quite unpardonable ?”

“ If concerning myself, I can assure you it is already forgotten.”

“ That is to say, you do not care what my opinion is, was, or may be.”

“ That is a very sweeping assertion,” replied Francesca, hesitating, for the best reason in the world—because she really did not know what to say.

“ Now,” continued the Chevalier, “ I feel sufficiently sorry for past injustice to be very desirous of both explanation and amendment. Mr. Evelyn ——”

“ Perhaps,” interrupted Francesca, “ you will

allow me to speak, and, in so doing, put an end for ever to a very painful subject. I have myself not a remark to make on Mr. Evelyn's conduct—and I wish to hear none. I owed it to Madame de Mercœur's kindness to have no concealments from her;—the explanation given, the subject will not again pass my lips. On yourself I can have no claim but for that general courtesy which I think authorises me to request that here the topic may be dropped."

" You are right; and, I can assure you, my own remembrance is too disagreeable to dwell upon. But it is a gratification to have friends; and I must be permitted to tell you how warmly the Duc de Mercœur took up your cause."

Francesca's anxious look now betrayed her attention.

" He called on me this morning to request me to be the bearer of a challenge to Mr. Evelyn."

" Good God!" exclaimed Francesca.

" You need not look so pale; Mr. Evelyn is half-way to Holland by this time—a fact which was my answer. Mercœur then bade me to be silent for once in my life. I promised, and, what is more, intend faithfully to perform."

Observing that his companion smiled, he went on,—

“ And you do not consider this communication any great proof of my discretion? On the contrary, it is its seal. I could not help gratifying you, by telling you what sincere friends you had; and myself, by entreating permission to remain at least in their outward rank.”

What answer but a gracious one could be made to such a speech? And the Chevalier with obvious discontent obeyed Mademoiselle Mancini’s signal, who wanted to ask some question respecting the royal departure, on which he was to be an attendant.

Francesca remained, rather marvelling in her own mind at the change in De Joinville. With all her recently acquired experience in society, she scarcely arrived at the right conclusion. The truth was, her last words to Evelyn had done her great service with the Chevalier, who was charmed to hear her say, that it was no preference that had ensured her fidelity. No man likes to hear that any woman is in love with his friend—it seems a sort of personal affront to himself; and, without being *épris* with Francesca, De Joinville admired her quite enough to have an undefined resentment at her favour to another. And here we cannot but note the less selfish nature of woman. In nine cases out of ten, a girl is delighted in her

companions' conquests—to be confidante is almost equal to having the lover her own. This, we grant, is confined to the very young, and perhaps they may consider it as an augury ; still, this mere satisfaction in confidence is a purely feminine feeling. Besides, to do De Joinville justice, he felt, too, a degree of kindly compunction for the former harsh judgment entertained of one who so little deserved it; and—for there is no such thing in the human mind as an unmixed sensation—he was struck both with the spirit with which she resented, and the proud humility with which she forgave the affront.

The idea of the parting so near gave rather more than usual animation to the circle. The visit to the camp—the hope of meeting with the enemy, were but stirring excitements; all were too young, too happy, too prosperous, for fear. The room was crowded and warm ; and, stepping from the window, Francesca leant on the balustrade which looked on the garden below, silvered over by the quiet moonlight.

“ I hope,” said a voice by her side, “ your absent brother will not engross all your orisons.”

“ No one will offer them more fervently than I shall do for your Grace’s success,” said Francesca, who instantly recognised her royal com-

panion. A minute's silence ensued—the young Italian always required encouragement to converse; and Louis was struck by the beauty of her profile, whose pure and sculptured features seemed so much more than fair in the soft clear radiance.

A burst of laughter now came from the chamber.

“How this perpetual gaiety,” exclaimed Louis, “jars upon the ear! Good Heaven! is farewell to be said so gladly? I sometimes start when I think upon the hollowness of all that surrounds me. I often wish my eye had the power of searching the inmost depths of the bosoms whose watchword is my name.”

“And amid, perhaps, some disappointments, how many hearts would you not find faithful and devoted to your Majesty!”

“I wish but for one.”

Francesca looked down and blushed,—first, at the earnest gaze of Louis's face; and, secondly, but still deeper, at her own folly in having individualised a general expression.

“It were against all rules, whether of history or romance—whether I look to my grandfather Henri Quatre, or to the less veracious chronicles of Scuderi, and copy Oroondates—to depart without some favour.” So saying, he took a little bunch

of white violets from her hand, and then raised the hand itself—after a moment's half-hesitation, he kissed it, and left her side.

Francesca was at first surprised at the youthful monarch's gallantry ; but her thoughts soon wandered to other subjects—for thoughts usually wander when neither vanity nor interest fix them.

“ I have news for you !” exclaimed Madame de Mercoeur, when they retired for the night ; “ Marie is going to be married—in another week she will be Countess of Soissons. A splendid fortune—the blood royal,—I think even her expectations must be satisfied.”

“ I hope she will be happy,” said Francesca. “ But what will the King say ?”

“ Whatever his mother pleases—the present visit to the camp is, I suppose, by way of consolation. Perhaps, though it has been kept so quiet, to prevent interference : we never understand the value of things, hearts included, till we are about to lose them. I was not aware of the alliance till this afternoon. My uncle’s presents, I hear, are magnificent.”

The image of Guido naturally arose in his sister’s mind—how would this marriage affect him ? Surely it were best, if any vain and unavowed hope—unavowed even to himself—lurked

in his dreams, that it should be utterly destroyed. “ Alas, my brother !” thought she, “ we are alike in this — each must part from the first idol which the heart set up ; and each, too, with a deep sense of its unworthiness, and a late, sad knowledge of the falsehood of our early creed ! ”

A stronger affection seemed born of the conviction. Each was yet left to the other — Italy still remained : and Francesca fell asleep, and dreamed of returning to all the hopes, pleasures, and scenes of her childhood.

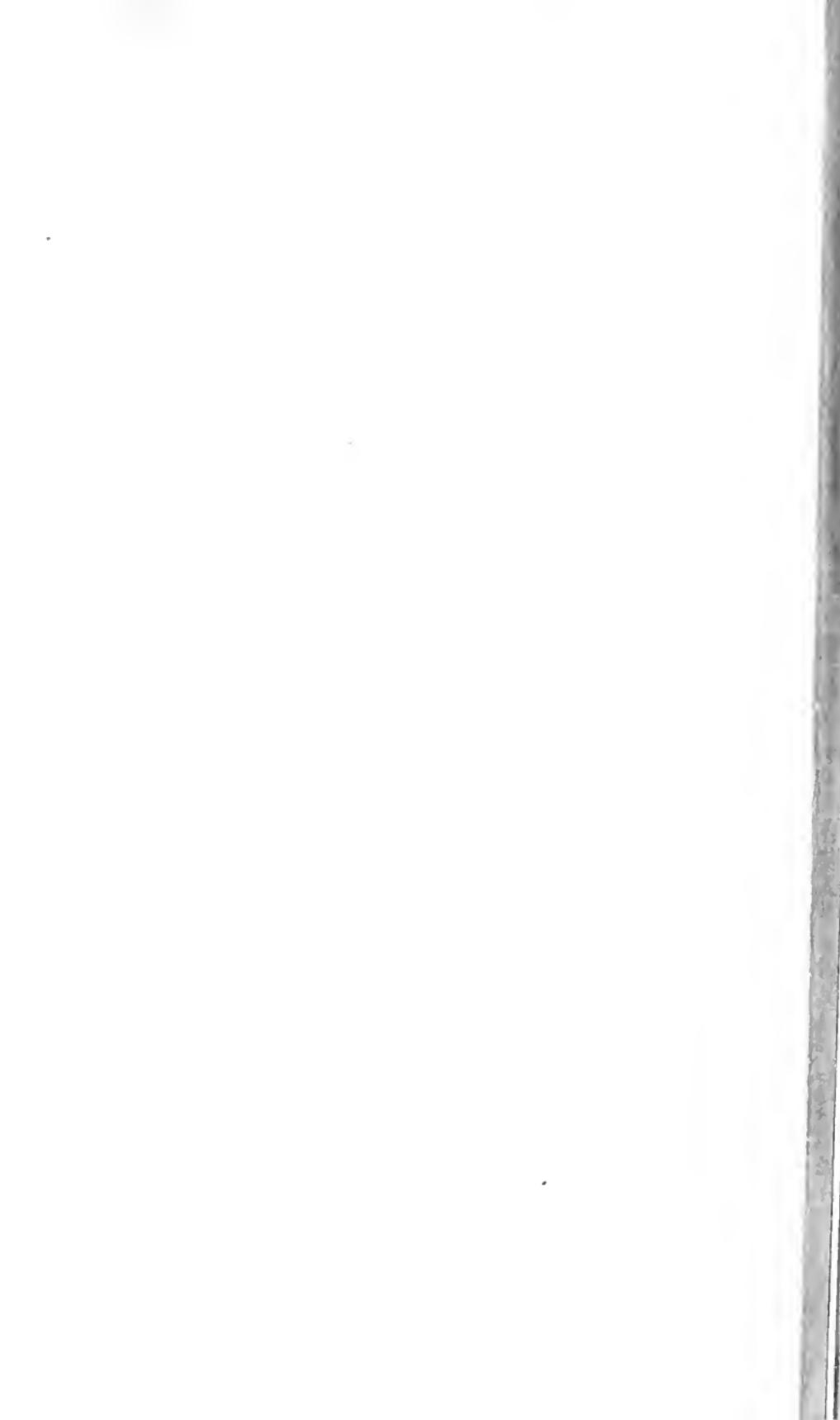
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